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INTERFERENCE.



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A Novel.

BY
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AUTHOR OF

"PROPER PRIDE," "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE,"
"A BIRD OF PASSAGE," "DIANA BARRINGTON,"
"TWO MASTERS," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

BALLINGOOLE.

“So sleeps the pride of other days.”

THE town of Ballingoole has always awakened a certain amount of respectful surprise in the minds of strangers ; it is so amazingly unlike its name ! According to tourists who wish to pay it an extravagant compliment, it actually recalls a fine old English village, and, indeed, in its palmy days, Ballingoole would not have considered itself at all flattered by the comparison. Fifty years ago it was the stronghold of one of the most rigidly exclusive circles in the south of Ireland.

The wide hilly street was lined by noble and imposing residences, that looked as if they had quitted country parks and pleasure grounds, and flocked together for company ; liberally planned gardens—celebrated for fruit and roses—sloped away from French windows at the rear of these mansions, to the very brink of a slow, brown canal—once glorified by fly boats, galloping teams and gay passengers, but now abandoned to lethargic barges, bearing freights of turf and manure. In the good old days the town was peopled by retired officers (naval and military), wealthy widows, and well-born spinsters, and actually numbered a baronet, and the brother of a viscount among its tenants.

There was an extensive collection of the best society in Ballingooole in former times ; whist parties—concluding with very potent negus, goloshes and lanterns

—substantial dinners, with weighty joints, strawberry fêtes, and hunt breakfasts, were of common occurrence. To tell the truth, “the town” was somewhat exclusive, and secretly turned up its nose at most of the county folk ; but now, alas ! times were changed, and the county turned up its nose at the town.

As years went on, ancient inhabitants who remembered the illuminations after Waterloo, and told anecdotes of George the Fourth, had been gradually gathered to their family vaults, and there was no inducement for other gentry to take their places. Some of the finest houses were let in tenements, and displayed small washings fluttering from upper windows. Several stood empty, with rusty area-railings, and shattered panes. Over the late abode of a baronet, hung three weather-beaten golden balls, and the man-

sion in which Mrs. General Moriarty once held her famous routs and card parties, thinks itself very lucky to be no worse than the police barrack!

Yes, the big houses now merge into shops, the shops into one-storeyed cottages, and the cottages into squat mud hovels, at the foot of the hill, down which Ballingooole has been going in more ways than one, for many years past. At the head of the street, two residences are still let to genteel tenants. Mrs. Finny, a doctor's widow, and her daughter ; and Miss Dopping, an eccentric old maid, occupy the best houses in the place, for the traditional old song. This is a consideration with Mrs. Finny, a lady with a limited income ; but Miss Dopping is rich, and could afford herself a house in Park Lane, if so disposed. She is the last of her family, the sole legatee of more than

one comfortable fortune, but no one would suppose it from her appearance, as she stalks down the street, tall, gaunt and shabby. Although upwards of seventy years of age, she is as erect as a lamp-post, having been reared in the great back-board period ; and, despite her rusty black bonnet, frieze cloak, and ridiculous purple woollen gloves, there is no mistaking her for anything but a lady.

It was a soft November afternoon ; the hedges were not yet quite bare ; the haws—signs of a hard winter—clustered in thick red bunches, and yellow leaves, from overhanging beeches, fluttered reluctantly into the muddy road. There was not a sound to be heard in this still country spot, save the distant rattle of an ass's car, and the clump of Miss Dopping's umbrella, as she trudged along a foot-path, but few degrees drier than the

highway, *en route* to pay her quarterly visit of ceremony, to her neighbour, Mrs. Redmond of Noone.

Another half mile of the greasy foot-path, and a lofty wall, topped with firs, comes into view, also a pair of big iron gates (once green), also a winding avenue—which is very green indeed—lined with dripping trees and over-grown laurels. In answer to a scream of “gate” in Miss Dopping’s cracked falsetto, a fat old woman, with a shawl over her head and a key on her finger, came waddling out of the lodge, and said as she curtsyed profoundly :

“Good evening to you, me lady—a fine, soft day.”

“And how are you, Juggy?” enquired Miss Dopping, with a keen glance into Juggy’s round, red face.

“Faix, but poorly, me lady. I have

had a cruel turn of them rheumatics ; they catches me here, and here, and here ” —clutching her elbows, back and knees, to illustrate her sufferings. “ I feel as if I was being crucified, like the saints and martyrs, but a good flannel petticoat would put the life in me,” and she stared significantly at her interlocutor.

“ It’s only the damp weather—I feel it myself,” returned Miss Dopping unsympathetically. “ Any one above ? ” pointing up the avenue with her notable umbrella—an immense alpaca construction of distended proportions, likewise remarkable for a huge ivory handle, representing Death’s head. When remonstrated with upon the subject of its size and age, its owner invariably replied :

“ It was good enough for my mother, and is good enough for me, and will wear out fifty of your nasty flimsy gimcracks.”

“Yes, me lady, I am afther opening the gate for Mrs. Finny and Miss Maria.”

Miss Dopping ejaculated something inaudible, and looked over her shoulder, as if she had a mind to retreat.

“You may as well go up, ma’am,” urged Juggy, possibly divining her thoughts, “since you *are* so far. They are in it a good hour or more, and bid to be going soon, for there’s no tay, or cake and wine offered *these* times !”

“Now what are they doing out here ?” muttered the old lady to herself, as she plodded up the avenue. “They were here three days ago to my certain knowledge.”

“Oh ! so that’s you, Pat ?” to a shock-haired urchin, with bare red legs, who burst through the laurels, with a grin of expectation on his dirty little keen face.

“Let me see,” diving into her pocket as she spoke, “were you at school to-day?”

“Begorra, I was, ma’am.”

“Then spell Ballingooole?”

Pat became painfully red, and his grin faded.

“Well, well, then never mind,” producing a little knitted jug, containing coppers, and placing three pennies in his ready palm—

“Have you been out dark fowling since?”

“No, ma’am,” was his reply,—but he lied unto her.

“Because if you ever do such a cruel thing again, as blazing lanterns into poor birds’ eyes, and knocking them down with sticks, you have seen the last of my coppers, as sure as my name is Sarah Dopping; so mind *that*,”

and with an emphatic thump of her umbrella, she tramped on.

The avenue at Noone was not imposingly long, and in a few minutes Miss Dopping had turned the corner, and was almost at the hall door.

Noone House was a straggling building, with no pretensions to beauty, dignity, or even antiquity—merely a big, grey mansion, with three rows of windows, and a glass porch, overlooking a low flat demesne, fringed with rows of dreary fir-trees. The back of Noone was flanked by a fine, old, seasoned garden, and many acres of worthless woods, which swarmed with rabbits. The land was poor and marshy—not to say boggy—neither useful nor ornamental, and the rabbits were an important item in Mrs. Redmond's income. She was the widow of an idle Irish

gentleman, with a magnificent pedigree and a meagre fortune, who had departed this life, leaving her two hundred a year and one fair daughter—and she had endeavoured to make the most of both. At eighteen, Isabel Redmond was a remarkably handsome girl, the cynosure of many eyes, as she and her mother paraded about in showy costumes, to the strains of a seaside band. She was unusually lively: she could sing pretty little French songs, and act and dance in a sprightly manner, and was taken up, and asked about, by discriminating matrons—with no unmarried daughters—and more than once had been upon the brink of an enviable match. Mrs. Redmond was ambitious, and her anticipations in the shape of a son-in-law modestly stopped just short of royalty. She strained every nerve—and she was an energetic woman

—to dress her idol with fitting display, and to carry her into the most popular haunts of men (eligible men). Garrison towns, where cavalry were quartered, French watering places, and German spas, affected by rich and gouty bachelors, were visited in turn by Mrs. and Miss Redmond. These visits were brilliant, if brief; they generally made some gay, agreeable acquaintances—"birds of passage" like themselves, who voted them charming, and loudly regretted their departure—as did also their too trustful tradespeople, for Mrs. Redmond had a bad memory for small bills. She was an indefatigable chaperon, the most industrious and intriguing of her sex; and no galley slave, toiling at his oar, under the blazing Mediterranean sun, worked harder than she did at the business—the vital business—of keeping

up appearances, and “getting Isabella settled.”

To say that the army list, the county families, and the peerage, were at her fingers' ends, may give some faint idea of her reading. As to writing, she was an untiring scribe, and deservedly merited a private secretary ; corresponding with important acquaintances, with distant, aged, and wealthy connections, plying all with graceful, flattering letters, ditto photographs of Belle, and expensive Christmas cards ; snatching ravenously at vague invitations ; following up marching regiments, and anxiously courting the female relatives of rich young men. After ten years of knocking about Vanity Fair, the most pushing and plausible of vendors, her wares were no longer in their first freshness, and alas ! still unsold ; for Miss Isabel, though beautiful,

was said to have a cold heart, a hot temper, and a head as empty as her purse. Connections had died, and made no sign. Correspondents were dumb; promising partners of Belle's had revoked miserably and fled; fine acquaintances averted their eyes from what they considered a shabby old sponge, with a *passée* daughter, and the poor-house loomed immediately in her foreground. Mrs. Redmond was at the end of her credit and resources, and struggling in an angry sea of debt, when Providence threw her a plank. Old Brian Redmond, one of her many irons in the fire, having quarrelled with all his near relatives, departed this life, leaving (to spite the proverbially hated heir-at-law) Noone House and lands "to the pleasant widow woman with the pretty daughter"—whom by the way he had never seen.

Joy ! Joy ! one of the widow woman's many sprats had caught a salmon at last !

Naturally she was enchanted at her good fortune, but—there is always a but. The bequest was in Ireland, the best country in the world to live out of, in her opinion, and she was obliged to agree to two stipulations before she could call Noone her own. In the first place, she must guarantee to reside on the premises, and, secondly, she must share her home with, and be “a mother” to, Brian Redmond's orphan grand-niece—a relative to whom he bequeathed a legacy of two hundred pounds a year. If Mrs. Redmond objected to these clauses, she had the remedy in her own hands, and Noone passed on to another remote connection, one of the Redmonds of Ballyredmond—a childless, rich, old man. Mrs. Redmond

hated the conditions of the will, but she was socially and financially bankrupt; better to exist in Ireland, than to starve in England; her health was bad, her energy abated, and after wearying the inmates of a cheap London boarding-house, with pompous boastings of "my place in Ireland," "my shooting," "my Irish property," went over, and entered into her kingdom, with a curious mixture of satisfaction and disgust. She had now been residing on her own acres for three years, saving and scraping with extraordinary enjoyment, ignoring ancient debts, and discovering a fresh and novel interest in leasing the rabbit warrens, selling fruit, fowl and turf, keeping few servants, no equipages, and finding her excitements in small country gossip, feuds with the butcher, and startling domestic economies. There was also old Brian's other legacy

—Elizabeth, or Betty, Redmond, with her two hundred pounds a year, which her self-styled “Aunt” coolly appropriated for her board and lodging, having removed her from school when she was seventeen years of age, believing that she could find a more excellent use at home for Betty and her money—in which belief the astute old lady was subsequently most fully justified. But enough of the inmates of Noone. For all this time we are keeping Miss Dopping shivering on its hall door steps. At first she rang gently, but firmly. After a pause, firmly, but not gently. Finally, a wild passionate peal; and then the distant slamming of doors, and a heavy deliberate footfall came in answer to her summons.

Miss Dopping was unmistakably put out, because there had been a delay in letting her in, and when the servant

volunteered to part her and her umbrella, she was, to say the least of it, a little short in her manner. The old lady was presently ushered into a drawing-room, cold as a vault. From an adjoining apartment, the babble of female tongues and shrill laughter was distinctly audible ; in a few minutes she was requested to “step into the study,” and here she discovered Mrs. and Miss Redmond, and Mrs. and Miss Finny, disposed in four arm-chairs, round a comfortable turf fire.

CHAPTER II.

GOSSIP—(WITHOUT TEA).

“Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women.”

—RICHARD III.

“DEAR me, Miss Dopping !” exclaimed her hostess, rising with an effort from the depths of a low seat. “This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. It is ages since I have seen you ! Do come near the fire. Ah, I forgot, you are not one of its worshippers, like me. I would rather dispense with my dinner than my fire !”

“You would not say that, if you had tried it,” rejoined Miss Dopping, seating herself bolt upright, and gazing sharply around her.

Mrs. Redmond shook her head from side to side, like a great pendulum, and leant back in her chair, and crossed her arms over her extensive waist. She was a majestic matron, dressed in black, with heavy regular features, little hard yellowish eyes, and a deliberate delivery. Her thick grey hair was covered with a black cap, and her plump hands with a pair of soiled grey kid gloves, minus their finger-tops.

Isabel or Belle—"Belle and the Dragon" were the names by which she and her mother were known in certain profane circles—lounged in an easy attitude in a basket chair, holding an *Irish Times* between her face and the fire. It was a handsome face, and she did well to protect it. Belle was a young lady of, shall we say, seven and twenty?—at any rate she says so her-

self, and looks no more, and of course every woman is the age she looks—with a pair of dangerous black eyes, straight black brows, a short upper lip, a pointed chin, and a sufficient supply of wavy dark hair. A small, graceful figure and a slender foot, were not the least of her attractions. But at present, neither figure nor foot are seen to any advantage, for she wears a dilapidated old red tea-gown, with ragged laces and stained front, and a pair of extremely *passée* slippers. In fact Belle's toilette must not be too closely scanned.

“Now, don't look at me! Don't look at me,” she said, gesticulating with much animation, and playfully holding the newspaper between Miss Dopping and herself. “I know I am an awful object; but in winter, I never adorn

myself unless I am going out—there is no one to dress for ! ”

“ No *men*, you mean,” amended Miss Dopping, severely.

“ Yes, I do. There is not a man at this side of Ballingooole, except Major Malone and Dr. Doran.”

“ And *he* is an old woman,” observed Miss Finny tartly—but naturally the daughter of the late practitioner had but scant mercy on her father’s successor.

“ You are a great visitor these times, Mrs. Finny,” remarked Miss Dopping, pointedly.

“ Well, dear, just once in a way, you know,” returned Mrs. Finny apologetically. “ Only just once in a way.”

She was a meek little lady, with a pretty, faded face, and a plaintive whine in her voice, totally different from her tall, masculine-looking daughter, who

had hard features, a square jaw, and a mouth like the slit of a letter-box—and in that mouth a renowned and dreaded tongue—Maria Finny was about forty-five years of age, embittered against all mankind, and the implacable enemy of the young and well-favoured of her own sex. Poor Maria ! In her life there had been but little sunshine, and not one ray of love, or the shadow of a lover. A long monotonous tale without a plot, without a hero—she had not even a hobby or a pet, she did not read, paint or write ; she superintended the scanty *ménage*, she ruled her mother, and lived meagrely and discontentedly, an aggrieved, soured woman, with an unfulfilled youth, and a bleak, hopeless future ; and yet Maria had ten times more capacity for passionate, unselfish love than brilliant Belle Redmond with

her enchanting smile and sympathetic eyes. Perhaps, if Maria's upper lip had been half an inch shorter, if her mouth had been of more reasonable dimensions, it might have made a vast difference in her destiny—who knows?

"We thought we would just look in as we were passing," she said, continuing her mother's explanation, "and tell Mrs. Redmond the news."

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Redmond, with unusual animation. "There is a stir in town, haven't you heard?"

"That Peter Brock's daughter is going to America after all? Of course I know *that*," replied Miss Dopping contemptuously.

"Not at all," said Maria. "Far finer news than about Mary Brock. I met Mrs. Malone driving herself into town in the donkey car; she seemed quite

excited, and her face all flushed in patches. She had just had a telegram ; her son, Mr. Holroyd, has come home from India on sick leave, and he has not given her any time to think it over, for he arrives to-night."

"Delightful !" ejaculated Belle, dropping her paper, and clapping her hands softly.

"He has not been at Bridgetstown these five years, and then only for a few days," remarked Mrs. Finny. "He and the Major don't get on. Nor stable their horses together."

"And no wonder," retorted Maria forcibly. "Young Holroyd is a gentleman, and Major Malone is a gambling, greedy, selfish, old bully, and a nice respectable example for his son, Denis, spending half his time on race-courses, betting away every penny, and leaving

his family paupers. It's no wonder Mrs. Malone's hair falls out, and she looks so heart-broken ! She only keeps three servants now, and sells the vegetables and fruit, and the buttermilk, a penny a can. To my certain knowledge, she has had that brown bonnet this three years, and Cuckoo's boots are a shame and a disgrace."

"At any rate, she has only herself to thank," returned Mrs. Redmond, leaning still further back in her chair, and placing two capacious slippers on the fender, where they had a fairly prominent effect.

Seeing Miss Finny's eyes fastened on them, she said : "Well, yes, Maria, I am not ashamed of them ! My London bootmaker declared that it was a real pleasure to see a foot of a fine natural size ! I know you pride yourself on

wearing threes, but I call your feet disjointed deformities. However, about Mrs. Malone. Holroyd left her well off, a pretty widow, with one little boy; she might have left well alone, instead of marrying a good-for-nothing half-pay major."

"But you know, dear, he had a splendid property then," protested Mrs. Finny, in a piteous tone.

"He has no splendid property now," said Maria sharply; "there will not be an acre for Denis, and serve him right; an idle young scamp, it's my belief he will never pass for the medical."

"He is the apple of his mother's eye," drawled Mrs. Redmond. "She slaves for him, and screws for him, and keeps all his scrapes from the Major."

"And the Major's scrapes from her son

George," supplemented Maria, with a disagreeable giggle.

"Yes, the Major is a sore trial to all that are about him," resumed Mrs. Redmond. "No one is to spend but himself. He must have good dinners and cigars and wine——"

"Whisky, you mean," interrupted Maria with a snort.

"Well, whisky," impatiently, "and a high dogcart, and curly-brimmed hats and patent-leather boots, but everyone else may live on potatoes and salt, and slave for him like niggers, or he roars like a mad tiger, and no one dare say a word."

"I believe George Holroyd said a good many words to him, the last time he was here," replied Maria, expressively.

"Yes, and he took it out of George Holroyd's mother, as soon as his back

was turned,” whined Mrs. Finny—who always spoke as if she was on the verge of tears—“and he has spent every penny of her fortune. I can’t think how they live at all ; the poor things ! ”

“ Oh, Mr. Holroyd helps them,” explained Mrs. Redmond. “ Jane Bolland, at the Post Office, has often seen his cheques ; he has a good private income, besides his pay.”

“ Miss Dopping,” said Belle, suddenly addressing the old lady, who sat in grim, observant silence, with her purple gloves, exactly crossed on the Death’s - head handle of her umbrella ; “ you are the oldest inhabitant, and know everything ; do tell us all about Mr. Holroyd.”

“ Stuff and nonsense, Isabella ! you are taking me for Jane Bolland. Go to her ; *she* will tell you how many shirts he has to his back, how many cigars he smokes,

and how much he owes his tailor ; only give her time."

"No, no, I am not thinking of Jane. I want you to tell me—I mean to tell us—what he has a year."

"How should *I* know?" snarled Miss Dopping.

"A thousand?" in a coaxing tone.

"Have *you* a thousand?" very gruffly.

"But indeed, dear, he must have something handsome," pleaded Mrs. Finny, "for he keeps polo ponies and racing ponies in India, and has been very kind to his mother."

"Now, Miss Dopping," urged Belle boldly, "do be nice to me, do tell me all about him. I am dying to see him."

"I'll be bound you are!" returned the old lady ferociously.

"How old is he?" continued her undaunted questioner.

“Not much younger than you are yourself,” was the brutal reply, “within a year or so of thirty.”

“Oh, you dear old thing !” cried Belle, with a somewhat dangerous gleam in her eye, but a playful wave of her paper, “you always must have your little joke.”

Miss Dopping detested Belle’s familiarities ; she would almost as soon have had her nose pulled as be called “a dear old thing.” She was on the verge of some savage retort, when Mrs. Finny, who was still romantic, exclaimed pathetically : “He is so handsome in his photograph, so dark and soldierly looking—just a darling fellow.”

“Then he does not take after his dear mamma,” sneered Maria. “She is so pale and faded, she always reminds *me* of a white rat.”

“She has had enough to fade her, poor

soul," said Mrs. Redmond. "She has suffered for her folly. Now I may tell you, without vanity, that in my day, I was a young woman of remarkable personal attractions. I was quite a toast, and I was called the 'Lily of Lippendale.'" (It required a strong effort of the imagination to suppose that this bulky old lady, with a very sallow complexion, could ever have been the Lily of anywhere.) "I had poems written about me, and people used to wait outside our house to see me pass, and yet, though quite a girlish widow, I would never listen to a second suitor."

Here Miss Finny sniffed incredulously, and her mother said: "I wonder if Mr. Holroyd will see many changes."

"To be sure he will," snapped Maria; "why wouldn't he? He will see the Major redder and stouter, his mother whiter and thinner, Cuckoo as ugly as

one of her own young namesakes, and Denis, an idle ne'er-do-weel, sponging on his family, and playing spoil five in the stables."

"Don't you find it very cold over there?" screamed Miss Dopping, suddenly addressing a figure in a distant window.

A girl who was ripping some article of dress by the fading daylight, looked up and glanced interrogatively at Mrs. Redmond.

"Yes, Betty, my darling, I am sure you cannot see any longer; you must be perished; come to the fire."

In answer to this invitation, Betty approached and stretched a pair of thin red hands towards the blaze. She was tall and slender, and had a low, broad forehead, delicate features, and quantities of bright brown hair. To a superficial

observer, she was merely a gaunt, pale, shabby girl, who looked both cold and cross, and not to be named in the same year with our pretty, sparkling Belle, who was toasting her toes so comfortably on the fender. But when the sun lit up the golden tints of her magnificent hair ; when the wind gave her white cheeks a wild rose tinge ; when a smile illuminated her fathomless grey eyes, Betty, too, had her admirers.

“Mr. Holroyd will be quite a catch,” remarked Mrs. Redmond, rubbing her hands complacently, “and those Wilde girls will be sure to ask him over, although they have not called on his mother for years. He will show a *very* poor spirit if he goes near them ; they never ask anyone inside their house except young men ; they are always having ‘friends of their brothers,’ as they call them, to stay

at Mantrap Hall, as you have named it, Maria ; and a capital name it is."

"I wonder if he sings?" said Belle meditatively.

"Like his mother," exclaimed Maria, casting up her eyes to the ceiling.

"I hope *not*, poor unfortunate woman ! her singing reminds me of a dog baying at the moon. She ought to be muzzled at the piano."

Miss Dopping looked as if she thought some one else might as well be muzzled too !

"Mother," continued Belle, "we really must have the piano tuned, and must make some smart aprons and caps for Eliza. I shall write to Madame Rosalie by to-night's post. I have not a single decent dress, neither have you."

"What a stir, and what a fuss about one very ordinary young man !" growled

Miss Dopping. "After all he may be engaged to some girl in India!"

"He may," agreed Belle, "but, at any rate, he is not ordinary, is he, Maria?" turning a look of tragic appeal on Miss Finny, "you have seen him?"

"Yes, years ago; he was nothing very remarkable; he had nice eyes and a good figure, and looked like a gentleman, which is more than we can say for his step-brother, Denis."

Maria's verdict was accepted in solemn affirmative silence, and, after a little desultory conversation on a less absorbing topic than Mr. Holroyd, the Finnys and Miss Dopping departed into the darkness of a chill November afternoon at the thirsty hour of five o'clock.

As they poked their way down the greasy avenue, Maria exclaimed: "What

a mean old woman ! She had not the heart to offer us a cup of tea. Mark my words, mother, Belle Redmond will do her best to catch George Holroyd."

"Why ? What makes you say that, dearie ?"

"Why ? a child could tell you, and give you twenty reasons," said Miss Finny contemptuously. "She hates Noone, and would marry a tinker, to get away from it. She is not as young as she was, and is desperately afraid of being an old maid. She adores officers, and would give ten years of her life to go to India. Mr. Holroyd is in the army ; his regiment is in India ; he has private means, and is so to speak 'made to her hand ;' she will do all in her power to marry him. What do you say, Miss Dopping ?"

"I say that I hope the Lord will de-

liver him," replied the old lady very piously.

"Amen !" responded Maria Finny, with the fervency of a prayer.

CHAPTER III.

THE MALONES OF BRIDGETSTOWN.

“For there’s nae luck about the house.”

—W. J. MICKLE.

BETWEEN Bridgetstown and Noone lay Ballingooole, and the reasonable visiting distance of one Irish mile. Bridgetstown was a great, staring white house, with two low wings, that stood familiarly close to the road, although screened from the vulgar gaze by a high hedge of impenetrable laurels.

According to Major Malone, “the front of the house was at the back,” by which truly Irish statement, he meant that all the principal apartments opened south, into a delightful pleasure-ground, shaded by fine old trees, brilliant with flowers,

and bounded by the grey walls of a celebrated garden. No one, driving up to the bleak and rather mean entrance, would believe that the mere act of walking across a hall could create such a total transformation of aspect. It was like passing from winter into summer, and exchanging the shores of the White Sea for the Mediterranean. The Bridgetstown pleasure-ground was a notorious sun-trap, the rendezvous of half the bees in the Barony, and the ruination of any delicate complexion. Flowers that drooped and died elsewhere, here blazed forth in flaunting profusion; invalid cuttings sprang to health at once, and the frail, fastidious, "Marechal Niel" and "Cloth of Gold," draped the garden entrance as with a yellow mantle. Bridgetstown was a curious anomaly. The great white mansion was out of

place by the roadside, and the pretty demesne that lay to the right of a long range of walls (enclosing grounds and stable-yards) looked empty and houseless. A noble avenue of limes ran parallel to the garden, and led to no place in particular, and everywhere in general. It seemed as if the house had had a violent quarrel with the park and avenue, and was on the point of quitting the premises. The farms belonging to the property were also scattered over the country in the most inconvenient directions, but Major Malone, in his high, red-wheeled dog-cart, made a virtue of inspecting them very frequently; his care-takers could have told another tale! When his credulous wife supposed him to be making a martyr of himself, and superintending ploughing, hay-making or threshing, he was generally attending some race

or coursing meeting, or framing himself in the bow window of the Kildare Street Club.

Enough of the exterior of Bridgetstown. It is a raw November night ; a penetrating drizzle is descending ; let us go inside, and join the family at dinner.

A glance is sufficient to show that the house was built in the days when money was no object with the Malones, and when there was no struggling for cheap effect. The balustrades are carved oak ; the doors solid mahogany ; the marble chimneypieces works of Italian art ; the furniture, plate, and china were all of the best of their kind, a hundred years ago. True, the china is now cracked ; the plate somewhat battered ; the mahogany a good deal scratched ; the chintz and brocade faded ; but nevertheless there is an air of respectability,

a glimmer of the light of other days, lingering about the premises, that fails not to impress all strangers. The dining-room is large and lofty, papered with a dismal flock paper, the very touch of which thrills one to the tips of one's finger nails; the three windows are decently draped in dark moreen curtains; a fine fire blazes up the chimney, in front of which blinks "Boozle," a monstrous red tom cat, the dearly beloved *protégé* of Major Malone—a cat with a strong individuality, and considerable sporting rights as to rabbits and young game. Even the attractive aroma of a hot roast sirloin, does not entice him from the hearthrug—for he has eaten, and is filled with a prime young cock pheasant, and prefers his comfortable and contemplative attitude beside the fender.

The dinner table is square, and is

lighted up with silver branch candlesticks ; the forks and spoons are silver, too ; also the dish covers, wine coolers, and flagons ; the tumblers are real cut glass, and the china mostly old Worcester, though here and there eked out with a terrible blue and white Delft plate. There are no flowers to be seen, nor any attempt at table decoration, unless six rather greasy dinner mats come under that denomination. Mrs. Malone, who is head cook, chief butler, upper housemaid, and valet, has no time for such details, and in a family where the master is particular about his shirts, his boots, and, above all, his dinner, and there is a large house to be kept habitable, cows to milk, the door to answer, lamps, fires, and plate to be attended to, the mistress of but three servants must put her shoulder to the wheel. This mistress is a woman

of about eight and forty, and looks much older. She is thin and colourless, and her faded fair hair displays a very wide parting; her blue eyes are timid to abjectness, her mouth has a pitiful droop, and her once pretty hands are coarse and scarred with manual labour; she wears a black (cotton) velvet body, and a large pink topaz brooch and earrings, in order to look smart in the eyes of her eldest son. Poor Lucy Holroyd! you thought you had taken a fresh lease of happiness when you married bluff, handsome, hearty Major Malone. Little did you guess that you were offering your slender shoulders to a pitiless old man of the sea. Major Malone is still bluff, but no longer either hearty or handsome; his head is bald, but he endeavours to disguise the miserable truth, by arranging an effeminately long lock round and round his bare poll, and

affixing it thereto with bandoline—or, it may be, glue. Occasionally, in a high wind, or in a moment of intense agitation, this lock has been known to come down, and float wildly in the breeze, like a demented pigtail. To the Major “this lock is wondrous fair,” and his most cherished vanity, and he has the impudence to discourse of “bald old fogies” with contemptuous commiseration. He is dressed in evening clothes, with much care and precision ; wears a flower in his button-hole, and a diamond in his shirt, and is altogether a superior being to his shabby wife and daughter. As he deftly carves the sirloin before him, we get an inkling of his true character. For whom are those three large slices from the undercut that he so artfully sets aside, to soak in the gravy ? The remainder he apportions with an impartial hand, and when the undercut

is finished, he turns over the joint, and helps his customers from the less toothsome portion, but he does not dream of sharing those three appetising morsels reserved for his own most particular palate, and it is thus with him always ! Whoever goes short, it will not be Tom Malone. Number one must have the best of everything. Leaving him to enjoy his dinner, we pass on to his son Denis, a young man of four and twenty, who has not thought it worth while to make any change in his dress. Denis is undeniably plain ; even his fond mother—who shuts her eyes to so many things—cannot close them to this fact. He has dark, wiry, unmanageable hair, deep-set grey eyes, heavy eyebrows, heavy features, a hopeful moustache, and huge ears that stand from his head like the handles of a jug. When we add that he has a large powerful

frame, with hands and feet to correspond, that he slouches as he walks, and wears his hat on the back of his head, his portrait is complete. Denis is clever and has a fair share of brains ; he is one of those birds “who can sing, and won’t sing.” Whilst others toil along the dreary road of learning, he can skim the ground with comparative ease. He has a taste for mathematics, a taste for surgery, a quick eye, a steady nerve, and a profound faith in Denis Malone ; but he has a still greater taste for singing racy songs of his own composition, for playing “spoil five” and “poker,” and brewing whisky punch. However, in spite of his innate idleness and love of loafing and low company, his poor infatuated mother believes that he will be a credit to her yet. “Cuckoo,” his sister, is but fourteen ; therefore we will hope that she may improve, and will

not cruelly epitomise her features ; suffice to say that she is pale, long-legged, and sandy, and characterised by extreme unreserve, and insatiable curiosity.

Miss Malone is her mother's right hand, a first-rate household adjutant, but her father and brother's pest ; she acts as revising editor to all their best stories. She knows when Denis is at Nolan's (the nearest public-house), instead of being, as the Major imagines, in bed with toothache. She knows *why* her mother hides the key of the cellarette, and why her father never opens, but angrily tears up, all communications in certain blue envelopes. In short, she is wise beyond her years. Opposite to Cuckoo sits George, the new arrival, in whose honour are the branch candlesticks, topaz ornaments, and dessert. He is a good-looking young man, with a broad forehead, a pair of very expressive

eyes, and a carefully cultivated dark moustache, and, but that his aquiline nose is too large for his face (or it may be that his face is too thin for his nose) he would be remarkably handsome ; well-favoured, well-dressed, and well-bred, he makes an effective Valentine to his brother's Orson. In spite of his gallant efforts, conversation languishes ; queries about hunting and shooting fall woefully flat ; his relatives evince but a tepid interest in India, and his homeward voyage ; to tell the truth the Major's great mind is concentrated on his plate. Mrs. Malone's thoughts are distracted by an alarming letter which she received from the family grocer as she came down to dinner, and Denis is wondering how his brother makes his tie, and if he will lend him twenty pounds. Cuckoo, who has the unintelligible desire to talk,

common to her sex and years, converses affably for all, and keeps her unhappy mother on thorns, lest she should disclose too many domestic secrets. Having disposed of her pudding with startling rapidity, she said, as she scraped her plate :

“Mother made this plum pudding herself; she always makes the sweets now. Last Christmas, Eliza, the cook, was drunk; she sent the pudding up, stuck all over with lighted matches; it looked so funny; she drank the whisky! Once she got at father’s whisky, that he keeps _____”

“There, that will do, Cuckoo,” said the Major, sharply. “Hold your tongue; I wish there was a fly blister on it.”

By the time the decanters were placed before him, the Major’s own tongue was loosened, and he proceeded to discuss the

neighbourhood with considerable animation. *Apropos* of their own vicinity, he said : “ Nothing but parsons and old women about here now, George ! Great changes, you will hardly know any one in the parish. Eh ! what ? what ? ”

He usually concluded his sentence with this query, repeated as sharply as a postman’s knock.

“ There are the Finnys and Miss Dopping,” said Mrs. Malone, “ and the Wildes of Wildpark, and the Moores of Roskeen. I don’t think you know Mrs. Redmond. She came since you were here last. She has a daughter——”

“ I should rather think she *had* a daughter,” interrupted the Major, rapturously. “ There is not a handsomer girl between this and Dublin. Eh ! what ? what ? ”

“ Girl ! ” echoed his wife peevishly. “ I

would scarcely call her a girl ; she has been in every garrison town in——”

“Come, come, that will do !” exclaimed the Major rudely. “We all know you don’t like her. What handsome woman ever *is* appreciated by the old and ugly of her own sex ? I only wish I was a young man for her sake,” and he gulped down a bumper of family port.

“I’d be sorry to be hanging since she was thirty,” muttered Denis, who generally sided with his mother.

“Mrs. Redmond is dreadful,” said Cuckoo, bravely, “she drawls out her words as if they cost money, and she is fearfully stingy and mean, she always comes here at meal-time on purpose.”

“Yes, she is a fine old soldier, and knows her way about,” admitted the Major. “She never wants much for the asking, from a plough to a pie dish, and

she has a voice that would crack an egg. Eh ! what ? ”

“ She came here the other day,” continued Cuckoo, volubly ; “ mother was cooking, and could not see her, but she and Belle marched in, all the same, and said that they would wait for tea. We happened to have nice hot soda cakes, and Mrs. Redmond calmly took off her gloves and poured out tea, and ate three buttered cakes, and pressed them on Belle, just as if she was in her *own* house, and then said, ‘ Cuckoo, as your mother has a headache, she cannot eat soda cakes ; you have had as many as are good for you, and it is a pity to let them go downstairs, so I shall carry them off.’ And she actually made me do them up in paper, and took them home in her muff. Did you ever know such a greedy old thing ? ”

“I never knew her match,” growled Denis, in his deep voice. “The idea of making that unfortunate girl drag her about the country in a bath-chair the way she does ; she ought to be prosecuted for cruelty to animals. Betty is worth a thousand of Belle, with her airs and her eyes, and her humbug. Betty has no nonsense about her, and is as plucky as the devil.”

“And who is Betty ?” enquired George.

“You might remember her in old Redmond’s time,” replied the Major. “A girl in short frocks, spending her holidays at Noone—a sort of poor relation. Her mother died when she was an infant, and her father was drowned, trying to save another man’s life. She is now a tall slip of a girl, that comes into a room like a blast of wind, and runs mad over the country, with her dogs and Cuckoo.”

“She is a beautiful, warm-hearted, young creature,” protested Mrs. Malone, with a tinge of colour in her pale face.

“*Beautiful!* Oh, Lord,” shouted the Major, derisively.

“And has two hundred a year of her own,” continued his wife——

“Which Mrs. Redmond saves her the trouble of spending,” supplemented Denis in his deep voice, “and makes her go all the messages, and weed the garden, and draw the bath-chair. She is warranted quiet in single harness, spirited but gentle—fine action, mouth, and manners.”

“Betty does not mind,” proclaimed Cuckoo; “she is never happy unless she is busy. George, I am sure you will like Betty.”

“At any rate, she is a pleasant contrast to Belle, who spends half her time in bed, reading novels. And has the devil’s

own temper," remarked Denis in his basso profundo.

"Hold your scurrilous tongue, sir," bawled the Major. "What the deuce do *you* know about Miss Redmond?" Then to George, "She has a fine high spirit, which I must say I admire in a woman"—that is, in a woman outside of his own family—"she has been accustomed to the best society all her life, and to a great deal of attention, and dozens of admirers. She is very gay and lively, and finds it uncommonly slow at Noone. Poor girl, she says every week seems a year. I tell her if she wants to make the time fly, she has only to draw a bill at three months. Eh! what? what? She's a deuced pretty creature, and, begad, she and I are uncommonly good friends."

"She *flatters* father, that's why he likes her," explained the fearless Cuckoo, as

her mother rose from table ; and before the Major had time to launch some furious and fitting retort, Cuckoo was already giggling in the hall.

Bridgetstown was a house with long and windy passages, and Mrs. Malone and her daughter hurried into the drawing-room, whilst the men drew their chairs up to the dining-room fire. The Major lit a cigar, and began to talk "shop" (as a compliment to his step-son), reviving former memories of obsolete drill, and ancient mess anecdotes. George, on his part, assumed a polite interest in the recent autumn meetings and the odds on the Liverpool, and endeavoured to sympathise with the Major's bitter disappointment in "the Blazeaway filly," whom he had backed heavily at Fairyhouse races. Meanwhile Denis yawned, pulled Boozle's tail (thereby causing Boozle to lash it

about furiously) and, when his father was not looking, helped himself liberally to port. After the Major had related his favourite stock story, about a staff officer, a river and a chest of drawers, George and his brother joined their relatives in the drawing-room, whilst the elder gentleman adjourned to his own den, to his pipe, his sporting papers, and his betting-book. The drawing-room was cold and cheerless, despite a fire and lamps. Mrs. Malone rarely entered it, save to dust the ornaments, and superintend Cuckoo's practising. In answer to her brother George's request, Cuckoo seated herself before the grand piano with the utmost self-possession, and proceeded to perform a series of the most amazing exploits on the key-board. She thumped the instrument as though she had a spite against it—which she had—and clawed it like a

cat. Meanwhile her two brothers stood near the fire and Mrs. Malone hemmed handkerchiefs close to a reading lamp. Once or twice she glanced furtively at the pair on the rug. Could they both be her sons? It seemed strange that that tall young man with his air of distinction, that courteous, scrupulously-dressed stranger, could be brother to Denis, with his round shoulders, wild hair, and rude ways. Their voices were widely different. Denis possessed a deep, uncultivated brogue and inherited his father's bullying delivery. George spoke with a polished English accent. Their manners also were in strong contrast. George stood up when she entered a room, placed a chair for her, and listened to all she said with deferential attention. Denis contradicted her freely and frankly, and would as soon have thought of standing on his

head, as of offering her a seat. She was his mother, and therefore of course devoted to him. It was her business to mend his clothes and his socks ; fill his purse, and hide his scrapes ; all this was *her* duty, and his——? Well, he offered her his cheek to kiss every morning, when he was at home, and wrote to her regularly—if he wanted money—when he was abroad. George resembled his father. Poignant, melancholy memories stole into her mind, as she watched him through misty eyes—memories long banished by heavy cares, and heavy bills, and selfish domestic tyranny. What a different life hers might have been, had George Holroyd lived !

Cuckoo, who had now brought her performance to a violent end, came over to the fire, and stared expectantly at her elder brother, with a half simpering, half

impudent expression. "Thank you, Cuckoo," he said with a dubious smile.

"Thank you for what?" she enquired with a giggle.

"Well, since you ask me, for leaving off."

"I hate music!" thrusting her bony shoulders out of her frock.

"So I should imagine! Mother, won't you sing something?"

At this suggestion Denis opened his mouth in amazement, and then burst into a loud and scornful guffaw.

"For goodness' sake don't ask the mater to sing; you don't know her voice now; it's like a cracked fog-horn."

George turned sharply to his brother, with an angry light in his eyes, but Mrs. Malone interposed hastily:

"I never sing now; you forget that I am quite an old woman, my dear

George," and she smiled up into his face a pitiful smile.

But the little attention had pleased her ; she had been a renowned singer in her day. What a pathetically sad little sentence that is to many a woman—"In her day." How short is that day ! How fleeting—how soon forgotten by all but herself !

"How nicely your clothes fit, George," remarked his sister. "What a swell you are !" stroking his coat admiringly.

George made no reply : he could not return the compliment. Cuckoo's shabby frock was nearly up to her knees, her shoes were white at the toes, and her pigtail was tied with a boot lace.

"We have never sat here since Aunt Julia was over, last spring," continued Cuckoo, as she threw some turf on the fire.

“Oh, has *she* paid a visit here? I did not know.”

“I should rather think she *has* paid a visit—a visitation,” rejoined Denis, who was lolling with his hands in his pocket and his eyes half shut—an affectation of indolence being his best substitute for easy self-possession. “We thought we should have had to go away ourselves to get rid of her. We were afraid that she would be like the man who came with his carpet bag to stay from Saturday till Monday, and remained for twenty years.”

“She would have gone if she *could*,” retorted Cuckoo mysteriously; glancing at her mother who was holding a parley with some one at the door.

“What on earth do you mean? what was to prevent her?” enquired Denis; “the road was clear.”

“I won’t tell you, for you hate Aunt Julia, but I’ll tell George”—taking him firmly by the button-hole, and speaking in a whisper.

George rather mistrusted his gentle sister’s artless confidences, but there was no escape for him.

“She had no money for her journey ; twice she had it sent over, and twice mother borrowed it, so she could not get away ; she was here three months.”

“Nonsense, Cuckoo,” said her unwilling listener, drawing back ; “you should not say such things.”

“What has she been telling you ?” asked Mrs. Malone, rather anxiously, as she resumed her work.

“Only that we never sit here, mother, or have a fire in this room, or dessert, or coffee, or wine,” continued this pleasant child. “It’s all on account

of *you*, George," giving him a playful poke.

She was excessively proud of her handsome brother. Mrs. Malone reddened to her liberal parting, and fidgeted uneasily on her chair, and George said :

"Surely, mother, you are not going to make a stranger of *me* ?"

"The fattened calf for the prodigal son ! Eh ! What ? What ?" said Denis, mimicking his father, with a loud unmeaning laugh.

"Prodigal son !" screamed Cuckoo. "That's yourself. Do you know the last time he came home, George, he walked the whole way from Dublin ; he was nearly barefoot, and he had pawned——"

"*Cuckoo* !" exclaimed her mother authoritatively, "go and see if the passage door is shut ; now go at once."

Cuckoo and Denis collided in the door-

way, and left the room together ; and presently voices in angry recrimination, and the sound of a hearty smack, and loud sobs, were heard in the hall ; then a slamming of doors, a roar from the Major's study, and silence.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MALONE OPENS HER MOUTH.

“Let the world slide, let the world go ;
A fig for care, and a fig for woe !
If I can't pay, why I can owe.”

—HEYWOOD.

“MOTHER,” said George, after a truly eloquent pause, “why don't you send Cuckoo to school ? her accent is frightful, and——”

“I know, I know,” interposed Mrs. Malone, laying down her work, with a dismal sigh. “I am afraid she must strike you as ill-mannered and pert ; Julia thought so, too ; but then she told a whole room full of visitors that Julia was coming as soon as she had put in her new teeth ; the child is a great help

to me in the house, and remarkably open and truthful, as you may notice."

"Yes, the very densest must admit *that*, but the naked truths she introduces so gleefully are not always pleasant additions to a family circle."

"Perhaps not—perhaps she is too outspoken; she ought to go to school. We must think it over, but in these hard times, George, I don't know how we are to afford the expense."

"But I always understood that Major Malone had his land in his own hands."

"I am sorry to say he has, but farming is not his forte. We are always short of money. I cannot think how it is!"

She knew but too well how it was. The ready money received for oats, barley, and young stock, went straight into the Major's yawning pockets, and then

mysteriously evaporated ! How could she divulge to her son that his step-father had lost seven hundred pounds at the Curragh, and nearly as much at Cork Park races ; that his wine merchant and tailor were raving for their money ; that the servants were owed a year's wages ; that she blushed to meet the baker's wife, and was afraid to enter the post office.

“How is Denis getting on, mother ?” asked George, after a pause.

“I really do not know,” she replied with evident reluctance. “Dr. Moran thinks he has abilities ; he is fond of surgery, and you know, ever since he was quite a boy, he has always killed our pigs ; he says himself that his next examination is absurdly easy.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“You see he has such high spirits,

poor fellow," continued his doting parent, taking up arms for her darling, against something intangible in his elder brother's voice. "He is so young and spirited. It's hard to be tied down to books and loathsome dissecting-rooms, when he is such a splendid shot, and so fond of hunting and fishing. He is very sorry now that he ever decided to be a doctor ; he says he ought to have gone into the army like you."

"He can still be an army doctor."

"So he can," sighed Mrs. Malone, once more resuming her needle. "Well, we must think it over."

George leant his elbow on the mantelpiece, and looked at her attentively. How different from the golden-haired angel of his childhood ! How aged and thin, and worn she had become during these last five years !

“Mother,” he said abruptly, “you are looking ill and worried ; what is the matter ? Have you any trouble on your mind ?”

“Yes, George, to tell the truth I have ; but I am not going to share it with you. So don’t ask me. You have been only too generous—the best of sons—and if I have seen but little of you of late, nor seemed a real mother to you, I have never forgotten you day and night, and when I heard that you were so ill, I cannot tell you what I suffered, or describe my feelings.”

(The Major’s feelings were those of complacent anticipation ; if George died unmarried, his income of five hundred a year lapsed to his mother for her life.)

“Are you quite sure that the sea voyage has set you up ? And *tell* me, dear, do you wear flannel next to your

skin?" gazing up into his face with an expression of intense anxiety.

"Do I look like an invalid?" he returned with an evasive smile. "I am as right as a trivet now. I was well before we reached Suez. Never mind me, but tell me all about Denis," and leaning towards her, he said:

"Your trouble is about *him*, is it not?"

"George, you must be a wizard. How could you guess? Well, you are right; it *is* about him. His college expenses are frightful, and his tailor's bill is incredible."

"I should not have supposed that he spent much on his clothes," remarked his brother gravely.

"But he does, and there is a long account at his grocer's—he breakfasts in his rooms—for tea and sugar, and

raisins, and candles—such *quantities* of candles, but he will study at night.” (Miserable Mrs. Malone! for candles, read whisky, for sugar, porter, for tea, gin). “I really dare not show them to his father,” and she put a ragged lace handkerchief to her eyes, and wept.

“Perhaps, mother, you had better show them to *me*,” suggested George.

“No, no, you are far too liberal. You have little enough as it is,” she sobbed. “I am past help,” casting her thoughts over all their debts, their accumulating debts in Dublin, Ballingooole, and at the county bank. “You might as well try to bale the sea with a tea-spoon as to help *me*.”

“But if I may not help my own mother, whom may I help?” he urged eagerly. “I have been living at a cheap little up country station, where I had no

way of spending rupees, and I have a good balance at Cox's. I can let you have a cheque for three hundred pounds at once."

"Oh, George, I am ashamed to take it," she whimpered, drawing him towards her, and throwing her arms round his neck. "You make me feel like a guilty woman ; you make me feel like a thief."

"Mother, you must never say that to *me*. Besides, you forget that I brought you home no presents. I was too hurried to look for things in Bombay, and I am sure you can lay out the money far more sensibly than I should have done, in trashy curiosities."

(This three hundred pounds was part of a sum that he had set aside for his trip home ; he had had visions of a couple of clever hunters, of renting a small shooting-box, of a round of the

London theatres, and a trip to Paris and Nice.)

“Is it true that your Uncle Godfrey is going to make you his heir?” she asked, as she dried her eyes and brightened up a little; “I heard something about it from old Miss Holroyd.”

“No, he offered me a large allowance if I would cut the Service and marry.”

“And what did you say, George? I hope you promised to think it over.”

“I thanked him, and declined. I have enough for myself. I have no idea of marrying, and I mean to stick to the Service, as long as it will stick to me.”

“If you ever *do* marry, dear, I hope you will get a good wife. Marriage is a great lottery, and there are many blanks——”

One of these blanks now walked into the room in the shape of Major Malone,

followed by a tray of light refreshments, also by Cuckoo, red-eyed, but tranquil.

George poured out a glass of wine, and carried it to his mother, whilst Cuckoo helped herself generously to macaroons, remarking, as she did so : “ Denis says that sherry is *poison*—eighteen shillings a dozen—don’t you touch it ; it’s only kept for visitors ; we never have supper like this when we are alone. These are lovely macaroons,” speaking with her mouth full. “ Cleary, the grocer, grumbled about giving them ; he is owed *such* a bill, and he says——”

“ Cuckoo,” roared her father, turning on her a countenance charged with fury, “ I have told you once before to-night to hold your tongue. Upon my word, Lucy, I believe that girl is possessed of some devil. I shall pack her off to a reformatory one of these days, I swear

I shall. As to Cleary, the grocer," now blustering and helping himself to a stiff tumbler of highly-coloured whisky and water, "he is uncommonly proud of my custom, and thankful to have it. It was my father who first set him going, and without the Malones of Bridgetstown he would be in a very poor way." (Thanks to the Malones of Bridgetstown, he *was* in a very poor way.)

The Major had a notion that tradespeople actually considered his orders a high compliment, and fully equivalent to cash, and when he strutted into a shop, be it tailor's, saddler's, or grocer's, he selected largely of the best. He did not comprehend self-denial, nor why *he* should lack anything that was furnished to men of ten times his means. Yet when creditors timidly ventured to ask for their little account, he considered it

a most impertinent liberty, as if they were begging for *his* money. He was not at all sensitive about debt ; he owed bills for years to his wine merchant and tailor, and had not the most remote intention of paying them. Ready cash could be laid out so much more pleasantly and satisfactorily. Besides, when wine has been drunk, and coats worn threadbare, is it not a cruel hardship to have your immediate attention requested to a very stiff account ?

Cuckoo took shelter behind the chair of her elder brother, and whispered to him, as she munched her macaroons, that “if anyone ought to be sent to a reformatory, it was Denis ; he was out now, smoking in the harness room, with Casey, the jockey, and Mooney, the sweep.”

Soon after this refecton the family

retired to rest. George had the luxury of a fire in his room, and sat before it for a long time, buried in thought.

What a home this was ! His mother a mere heart-broken household drudge ; his sister a mischievous, razor-tongued little savage ; his brother—he was beginning to fear that Denis, of whom his mother had written such glowing accounts, was neither more nor less than an idle scapegrace ; and, as to Major Malone—he was Major Malone.

Before the mistress of the house removed her unwonted finery, she got an envelope and pencil, and hurriedly jotted down her most pressing debts. The butcher's bill was £209. Would £80 stop Mrs. Maccabe's mouth ? The baker was owed £75, and one of Denis' most dangerous creditors was clamouring for a hundred "on the nail." There would

be no margin for Cuckoo's new outfit, nor for the sealskin jacket for herself, at which George had hinted. This three hundred would be a mere drop in the ocean. George must write her a larger cheque. Yes! poor woman, her finer feelings were blunted by distressing and disgraceful shifts; the iron entered into her soul when she evaded Miss Bolland, and cringed to Mrs. Maccabe—terrible Mrs. Maccabe! George was well off; he had no ties, and but few expenses; and, in spite of all her tears and deprecations, she was prepared to despoil her eldest born, to shield and succour Denis.

“Lucy,” said the Major, looking through his dressing-room door, tie in hand, “do you think that fellow would back a bill for me? Eh! what? what?”

“No, indeed, Major, I am certain he would not,” she returned indignantly.

“What have you got on that paper there? Eh, show.”

“Bills; debts; we owe so much money that I am ashamed to walk through the town. Cleary, the grocer, sent up to-day, and, as to Mrs. Maccabe, I tremble when I see her.”

“Pooh! So does everyone; you are not uncommon in that, the old termagant! I say, is that son of yours going to put his hand in his pocket? What’s the use of a rich fellow like that, if he won’t help his mother. Eh! what? what?”

“He is not rich, far from it; he believes that I have my jointure of four hundred a year; he does not know that I sold my life interest in it years ago.”

“I hope you impressed upon him that

times were bad ; I will go bail you cried ; it's about the only thing you are good at," he concluded with a savage sneer.

"He has promised me a cheque for three hundred pounds," said Mrs. Malone coldly.

"By Jove ! then I will go halves !"

"No, indeed, it's little, it's not half enough. Do you know that we owe Kane, the baker, seventy-five pounds, and he is a poor man too."

"Bosh ! I'm a poor man ; let these cormorants wait. They *must* ; debts of honour come first, and I owe Dunne, of Jockey Hall, a hundred pounds, which will have to be paid at once."

"A bet ?"

"Yes, a bet," he answered, with a defiant scowl.

"Tom Malone," she said, tearing the

envelope slowly as she spoke, "do you ever think what my life is? Do you know how often I wish I were dead? Do you suppose, if George Holroyd had lived, that I would be the poor, mean, unhappy wretch that I am?"

"There, don't give me any more of that sort of stuff; you know the old proverb. Eh! what? Never marry a widow, unless her first husband was *hanged*. I have no doubt that if George the First was the cool-headed, fastidious, fine gentlemen his son is, he would have been devilish sick of you long ago. Mind one thing, I must have that hundred pounds this week; that chap is well off, times are hard. Why, I am actually smoking a pipe, and drinking cheap Scotch whisky! You are his mother, you have a strong claim on him. So don't be afraid of opening

your mouth." And with this injunction, he entered his dressing-room and shut the door.

One scene more before the night closes. Let us take a peep at Belle Redmond, as she sits over her bedroom fire, with a small looking-glass in her hand, carefully examining first her teeth, then her eyelashes. She has been building fine castles in the air, ever since Juggy, at the lodge, announced that "a strange gentleman, in a grey ulster, had passed on a hack car, about six o'clock."

"He won't come and call to-morrow," said Belle to herself. "No, but after to-morrow we must always have a good fire in the drawing-room, and I shall wear my brown dress, and see that Eliza is ready to answer the door. Betty must make a cake. Oh, dear, I hope he will be better than that oaf, Denis! And

have some life and go in him, for I shall do my best to marry him, no matter how hideous he is. Another winter here would finish me. I should certainly be found hanging from the baluster one fine morning. How Eliza would scream ! But she would not cut me down. No ! she hates me," and she smiled at her reflection in the mirror. " Yes," she said, with a nod to herself, " I am as handsome and as irresistible as ever. And to this young Holroyd, fresh from dowdy, withered women in India, I shall seem divine."

Then she laid aside her mirror, and, resting her chin on her hand, gazed into the fire, with an expression of unusual contentment in her dissatisfied dark eyes. Here is an opportunity to sketch Belle's portrait, as she sits thus staring meditatively into the red turf sods. She in-

herits her dark eyes, her excitable disposition, and her volcanic spirit, from her grandmother, a French Canadian ; and ever since she was a pretty and precocious—though somewhat sallow—infant, she has absolutely ruled her mother, who never attempted to contradict her wishes, nor to restrain her unusually fiery temper. What was amusing petulance at three years of age, was ungovernable passion at—well—twenty-nine. For each disastrous love affair, or social disappointment, had served to increase the force of her most prominent characteristic. She made no effort to control her furies before inferiors, or in the bosom of her family, for she had an idea that, as she was beautiful, she was absolved from being good ! Fortunately these domestic tornadoes were of short duration, and, whilst

the storm raged (and Belle raved, and stamped, and screamed) all the household bent before it, as reeds in a strong gale. When it passed over, the frantic madwoman of ten minutes previously, having gained her end, was a kissing, weeping, coaxing slave. Mrs. Redmond spoke of these visitations as "attacks on the nerves," but the servants gave them a totally different interpretation. Belle's scenes were chiefly enacted for the benefit of the home circle ; but now and then there had been disagreeable outbreaks in shops, in boarding-houses, and, above all, at the rehearsals of private theatricals, after which, it had been the painful office of her miserable mother to offer abject apologies, to eat humble pie, and to fly the neighbourhood. Belle was undoubtedly out of her element at Noone, a veritable swan upon a turnpike road.

She danced admirably, sang delightful little French songs, and acted with such grace and *verve* and real dramatic feeling, that spiteful people hinted that she was a professional, whose temper had been the bane of her engagements. But who wanted piquant chansons, or inimitable acting, in dreary Ballingooole? They would have been respectively stigmatised as French trash and tomfoolery; Belle pined for her former nomadic existence, and detested her present respectable anchorage. She loved the town and the gay haunts of fashion; loathed the country, and had a true Frenchwoman's abhorrence of wet fields, muddy roads, strong boots and dragged petticoats. Although she only understood house-keeping from a lady lodger's point of view, to wit, hashes, cold mutton, and poached eggs, she nevertheless eagerly

seized the reins of government on her arrival at Noone. Her restless spirit and maddening tongue (and, they said, mean ways) soon drove the old servants wild—servants accustomed to unlimited meat, unlimited tea, and unlimited leisure.

There was one tremendous scene of powerful domestic interest, and they all gave warning, and departed "*en masse*." After this catastrophe, the keys were made over to Betty, who established a new régime—and a great calm. Belle was unspeakably miserable ; she had nothing to do ; no congenial society ; nowhere to display her gay new hats. Far be it from *her*, to run after beagles, to gather blackberries, or to visit stupid, narrow-minded old ladies. She spent as much time from home as possible, and, when at Noone, lay novel-reading in bed, or prowled restlessly from room to room,

from window to window, and filled in the weary hours by combing her poodle, writing long letters, and reorganising her wardrobe. Sometimes, in fine weather, she dressed herself carefully, arrayed "Mossoo" in a pink ribbon, and strolled along a road that led to an—alas!—distant garrison town, on the meagre chance of meeting an officer who might drift thus far to shoot or fish. If she encountered one or two in a sporting dog-cart, and if they had stared very hard at the pretty, smartly dressed girl, and her well-trimmed companion, Belle's mission was accomplished; she was happy for *that* day.

* * * * *

The morning after George Holroyd's arrival, Mrs. Malone had a tearful and pathetic conversation with her son; and, as she sauntered, arm in arm with him,

round the wintry garden, she opened her mouth to such an extent, that he was compelled to make his head-quarters at Bridgetstown. There would be no spare cash for clever hunters, a trip abroad, or even a little mixed shooting. Surely Belle Redmond's star was in the ascendant.

CHAPTER V.

FOXY JOE.

“I know a trick worth two of that.”

—HENRY IV.

“JOEY, Joey, Foxy Joe, I say, hold hard.”

Thus challenged by Denis Malone, in a ringing brogue, an elderly dwarf, who had been shuffling along a boreen, halted and looked sharply about him. It was at the close of a dull afternoon; there was more than a hint of frost in the air, and over the marshy lands, at either side of the lane, a thin white mist was rising. To the left, Denis and his step-brother, with guns on their shoulders, were struggling across a bit of bog—towards where Joey stood awaiting them. Joey is possibly fifty years of age, and

not more than four feet in height. He has a long body, and very short legs ; nevertheless, he wears the clothes of a full-grown man ; his frieze coat almost sweeps the ground ; his waistcoat reaches half way to his boots, and his trousers are doubled back to his knees, and there pinned ; long, reddish elf locks fall over his collar, and his little grey eyes look out somewhat vacantly from a pent-house of bushy red brows. However, if not very bright—although Joey's enemies declare that he is more of a knave than a fool—at any rate he has wit enough for his business ; he is messenger and post-man to the neighbourhood, and wears a leather bag, slung over his shoulder, as an insignia of his profession. In one hand he carries a stout blackthorn, and in the other a plump woodcock. A minute later, George Holroyd was within

easy hail, coming over the wet tussocks with long strides ; these long strides suddenly increased to a rapid run, for a deep, wet gripe, with treacherous sides of thick, withered grass, lay between him and Joey. “ You’ll never do it, Captain darlin’,” screamed the dwarf, raising his stick. “ It’s eighteen foot if it’s——” Before another word left his lips, “ Captain darlin’ ” stood in the breen beside him.

“ Oh, begorra thin, well lepped ! You’re as souple as Pat Kearney’s heifer ; he can’t keep her out of the potato garden, at no price. Is she loaded, Captain ? ” pointing to the gun. (N.B., the Irish peasant believes every young officer to be a captain at the very least.)

“ To be sure, she is.”

“ An’ supposin’ she went off and shot me ? ”

“No fear of that, Joey,” remarked Denis, who had joined them. “A mannikin like you would be as hard to hit as a jack snipe, and they are the very devil. We saw nothing else to-day.”

“Well, well ; so ye had poor sport, had ye ? It’s a bad day for fowling ; what ails the red terrier, Crab ?”

“I peppered him with No. 9 shot, and I want you to carry him home.”

“Is it Crab ?” he returned, in a tone of peevish incredulity. “Faix, Mr. Denis, a lighter job would answer me better ! I’m sorry you did not shoot him all out, when ye went about it ! I’ve a print of his teeth in the calf of me leg yet. Look at him now, rowling the white of his eye on me, bad cess to him.”

“Well, then, carry my gun ; that won’t bite you.”

“Be gor ! I would not touch a shootin’

iron for the Pope himself—may be she'd go off in spite of me."

"What good are you, then?" exclaimed Denis, angrily. "Afraid of a dog; afraid of a gun; I'll go bail you would not be so nervous if you were asked to carry a quart bottle of whisky."

"Begorra, yer honour, ye have only to *thry* me! I've just been over at Mr. Blake's. Now there's a man for ye! He called me in, and gave me a glass of spirits strong enough to take the paint off a hall door. Be gor," his little eyes glistening at the recollection, "to this minute itself, I'm aware of a torch-light procession going down me throat."

"And what have you got there?" continued Denis imperiously.

"Oh, a terrible fine young woodcock Mr. Blake is sending Mrs. Redmond."

"Show it here."

Joey tendered it proudly.

“It’s a fine, heavy bird,” said Denis, balancing it critically on the palm of his hand. “And it’s a mortal sin to give it to an old woman that does not know goose from grouse. Where was it shot?”

“By Bresna Wood, I’m thinking—they are in now, but it’s over early to be shooting them yet.”

Meanwhile Denis, with the skill of a conjurer, had thrust his hand into his lean game-bag, and dexterously substituted the noble woodcock for a miserable jack snipe, which, as all the world knows, strongly resembles the former in everything but size. “Well, Joey, here you are!” handing him the snipe with imperturbable countenance.

“What!” screamed Joey, surveying it with open-mouthed horror. “What

devil's trick are you up to now, Mr. Denis? Arrah!" snatching at it passionately. "Give it back to me here, before you make a *wran* of it." It was evident that Joey believed that Denis had wrought a spell on the bird, and might possibly develop it so far as to reduce the woodcock to nothing at all.

"What's come over it?" he whimpered, turning it about in great perplexity. "What have ye done to it, at all, at all? Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, so ye ought; it's not the weight of a robin red-breast."

"Then give it to me again, and I'll blow on it, and make it the size of a cock turkey."

"In troth, and I won't. I know yer *too* well. Here our roads part," opening a gate that led towards Noone, "and I'll be for wishing ye good evening, gentle-

men ; *gentleman*, I mane," he muttered to himself as he shambled off, with the jack in his hand. "Sure all the world knows there's only *wan* in it."

Denis put down Crab ; leant his gun against the gate, and gave vent to a loud ironical view halloo. "Gone away—gone away—gone away—gone away !"

An unpleasant reference to Joey's nickname which Joey deeply resented. He turned back for a moment and shook his stick furiously at Denis, saying : "Never fear, me fine fellow, but I'll have it in for ye *yet*," and then plodded on.

"How that chap does hate me !" remarked Denis complacently, as he shouldered his gun. "I'd like to wring his neck. He is the spy and informer of the whole country."

"I say, though ! that's rather hard lines about the bird," expostulated his brother,

who had lagged behind, to pick up Crab. "What will Mrs. Redmond think, when she receives a surprisingly minute jack snipe, with Mr. Blake's compliments?"

"Oh! I'll take down the woodcock myself this evening, and kill two birds with one stone, for I shall see Betty—not to speak of Belle, a belle that no one seems disposed to ring, in spite of her fine eyes, smart frocks, and fascinating manners."

"Talking of manners," said his brother, "I wish Cuckoo could be sent to school."

"You may well say so! she's an awful brat. The mother spoils her and gives her her head entirely."

"She ought to be sent to some good, strict establishment without delay."

"She ought," assented Denis; "many things *ought* to be done, if the coin were forthcoming. For instance, I ought to

have been put into the Service—a cavalry regiment for choice—an only son and heir to a property, instead of being a pill !”

“How soon will you take your degree ?”

“I don’t know. I hate the whole thing ; sometimes I think I’ll enlist.”

“If I were you, I would stick to my profession, it’s a very good one, and now you are four and twenty, Denis, it’s time you began to put your hand to the plough.”

“I suppose the mater has been asking you to lecture me, eh ?” said Denis in a surly voice.

“No, indeed, she has not. She has the greatest faith in you, Denis. I am only speaking off my own bat.”

“Then, in that case, please keep your bat out of my affairs. I don’t meddle with you, do I ?” he enquired savagely.

“You have never done anything for *me* that I know of, and have no right to offer your opinion and advice. Advice is cheap.”

“All the same, I intend to tell you that I am very sorry to see you idling about at home, instead of making a start, and Cuckoo growing up without any education at all,” returned his brother firmly.

“Oh, she is not as bad as you think,” said Denis in a milder key. It would not suit him to have a row with George. “She does lessons three times a week with Betty Redmond ; she and Betty are tremendous pals—and talk of an angel, here she comes !”

At this moment, a roomy bath-chair, containing a substantial old lady, appeared looming down the road. At first it seemed to be rolling along of its own accord,

but, on nearer inspection, a black hat was visible (though almost concealed by Mrs. Redmond's bonnet, and enormous yellow boa). A slender young girl was the motive power, and pushing behind with might and main.

It was getting dark, and faces were not seen very distinctly, but when Mrs. Redmond came near the two sportsmen, she imperatively called out, "Stop," and waved Denis towards her, with her gigantic fur muff.

"I've just been up to Bridgetstown, but I did not see your mother. They *said* she was out; however, I went in and sat down, to give Betty a rest. Cuckoo entertained us about—Ah, I suppose *this* is your brother; it is so dark, Mr. Holroyd, that I am sorry I cannot see you; but I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

Mr. Holroyd muttered indistinctly, and removed his cap.

“I am afraid you will find it frightfully dull here, and *so* different to military life ! I am devoted to the army, so is my daughter Belle. We have many friends in the Service. I hope we shall see a great deal of you ; whenever you are feeling at all bored, mind you come and look us up ! ”

Mr. Holroyd declared that he would be charmed to accept Mrs. Redmond’s invitation, but that he was sure he would not be at all bored ; he liked the country, and hoped to have some hunting.

Hitherto no one had noticed the girl behind the chair. The outline of her features was indistinguishable ; nevertheless, George had compassion on her, and said :

“Is this not rather heavy work ; the roads are so muddy ?”

“Not at all ! Not at all !” rejoined Mrs. Redmond hastily. “It’s all downhill going home, and exercise is capital for young people, especially this kind of exercise, for it brings all the muscles into play, legs and arms alike.”

“But surely it is rather a long distance for one young lady,” expostulated George.

“You ought to have Miss Redmond posted somewhere on the road as second horse—lay a *dâk*, as they call it in India,” suggested Denis facetiously.

“Pooh ! it’s only a mile from gate to gate. Belle would be only too delighted to take her turn, but she is such a little delicate darling, the slightest physical exertion knocks her up at once. For a strong girl it is nothing. Why, at Folkestone, I used to keep a bath-chair man

for three hours at a stretch, and Betty has had a long rest."

"Nevertheless, I hope you will accept me as her substitute, and permit me to convey you home," said George politely.

"Oh, well, really, Mr. Holroyd," exclaimed the old lady (divided between delight at the offer, and apprehension as to the style of raiment in which her dear Belle might be discovered), "I would not think of it ; no, not on any account."

"Oh ! but you must. I assure you I will take no refusal, I never take a refusal" (this was an excellent trait, thought the old lady), as he placed his hand on the back of the chair.

"Here, Denis, you can carry my gun, and Crab will have to walk ; he is more frightened than hurt ;" and before Mrs. Redmond could expostulate, he was rolling her rapidly homewards.

“Well this *is* kind,” she said. “What a delightful change from Betty ; she does jerk so, and can scarcely get me on at all. I’m sure it is all knack.”

“Knack, indeed,” thought her charioteer. “By Jove ! this old woman weighs fifteen stone, and the chair as much as a cab ; unfortunate girl, how her arms must ache !”

Meanwhile the unfortunate girl, and Denis, lingered behind, and Denis made over the woodcock, with a short sketch of its history, and roars of laughter.

“And how do you like *him* ?” enquired Betty, looking after the bath-chair. “Is he the stuck-up beast you expected ?”

“No, I cannot say that he is stuck-up, but he is rather superfine for Bridgetstown ; he wears silk socks of an evening, flies to open the door for the mater, and calls the governor ‘Sir.’”

“You must be quite startled at such queer ways,” returned the girl, with an irony that was completely lost on her listener. “Anything else?” she asked blandly.

“He is shocked at Cuckoo, and no wonder, and he has been trying to lecture *me*.”

“And no wonder,” she echoed expressively.

“Now, Betty!”

“Pray, what was the text of his lecture?”

“Hanging about at home, and you know *who* is to blame for that,” and he tried to look sentimental, as he peered into her face.

“Denis, don’t be ridiculous! you are like a dying duck in a thunderstorm. I know very well who is to blame for your idleness; no less a person than

yourself: you loaf about the country with a gun or a rod, when you ought to be earning your living, or learning to earn your living, like another young man. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, I know *I* am ashamed for you."

"I've a good mind to enlist!" he exclaimed in a tone of gloomy resolution.

"Well, anything is better than idleness," returned Betty cheerfully. "I would far rather see you a steady private soldier, than a good-for-nothing private gentleman."

"There's no one, not even my mother, who would dare to speak to me as you do, Betty Redmond."

"Your mother, poor soul! I suppose not, but as to other people, it's not that they don't dare—they don't *care*! Do you imagine that anyone is afraid

of such an insignificant helpless idler as Denis Malone ? ”

“ Betty, you *have* a tongue, and no one suspects it but me ! ” cried Denis, angrily.

“ Well, I am very glad that it is sharp enough to penetrate your rhinoceros skin. I hope you will take what it says to heart. Now, I must fly. They are nearly out of sight.” And with a gesture of farewell, she ran after the bath-chair.

Mrs. Redmond talked incessantly as she was trundled along. She discoursed of the dreariness of the country, of her military friends, of her limited means, and of Belle, her beautiful Belle ! Utterly lost in this wilderness—a veritable pearl among swine—Belle, the ornament of countless balls, the admired of all, the cynosure of even royal eyes,

and yet, in spite of her dull life at Noone, she was so gay, so contented, the very light of the house !

This was satisfactory information, for when they arrived at the hall door, the whole mansion was in outer darkness. Belle was sitting in the study, with a small French poodle in her lap, and three fox terriers stretched out before the fire, in various attitudes of luxurious repose. These latter animals had been the property of the late master of Noone, and actually enjoyed a legacy of five pounds each per annum, for the term of their natural lives—and of course it was Mrs. Redmond's interest to prolong their days, though she did not care for dogs. Their names were respectively "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson," and they had each their distinctive characteristics.

“Brown” was stout, elderly, and self-conscious ; he liked his comforts, such as fire, a regular walk, and a good and punctual dinner. He was a *bon vivant* and did not eat fat or vegetables—an habitué of the kitchen—and slept with the cook.

“Robinson” was a young and very handsome animal, who was fond of admiration, and ladies and tea ; was particular about his appearance, and had quite a fund of small affectations ; he was a general favourite—even Mrs. Redmond was proud of “Robinson.”

“Jones” was also young and handsome—white body, black and tan head—a mighty hunter, whose thoughts were centred on sport, and who cared not a straw for the cook—indeed his whole heart was given to Betty. He led a joyous, but by no means innocent, life,

in the woods, and would sit over a rabbit hole for hours, and, when he was in full chase of poor bunny, his delighted barks made the plantations to ring. Many a time, he would return late at night, and lay his prey at Betty's feet, gobble down his dinner, stretch his tired, muddy body before the fire, and there hunt in dreams!

On this particular evening, all the dogs were at home, "laid out," so to speak, on the hearth-rug, whilst Belle nursed "Mossoo" and devoured a battered novel, by the light of a cheap candle.

"Mossoo," a pampered, shivering, discontented little beast, was adored by his mistress—in fact, she belonged to him—not he to her! He was washed, trimmed, be-ribboned and caressed, fed on cream and chicken, and dainty dinners, with plenty of gravy. He had no sport-

ing instincts, he disliked mice, was desperately afraid of cats and of wetting his feet, and the other dogs hated him, as boys in a family invariably hate the pet, the coward, and the sneak. He was accomplished too, degradingly accomplished; and as he went through his antics and stood upon his head, "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson" sat and stared at him with grave and scornful faces, and seemed to glance at one another as much to say: "Did you *ever* see such a fool?"

However, as long as "Mossoo" had fresh cream and a soft pillow, and his mistress's applause and devotion, he was above the opinion of his fellows.

Suddenly there was an unusual sound, a strange voice in the hall; the dogs leapt to their feet, and tore out of the room, one yelping, skelping whirlwind.

If Belle had been a man, she would have used strong language as she capsized "Mossoo," laid down her book, and strained her ears to catch a sound above that maddening din.

Yes ! a man's voice, and then her mother's.

"Oh, you must come in, you really must ! and have a glass of our celebrated rhubarb wine " (celebrated indeed !)

Belle jumped up. She was in a shabby, old, red tea-gown ; her hair resembled a bottle brush. With great presence of mind she blew out the candle, pushed one or two chairs into their places, flung herself into a luxuriant seat, rather out of the fire-light, and feigned sleep.

"If mother orders the lamp," she said to herself, "I am lost."

But luckily her astute old mother

grasped the situation, and when, ten minutes later, George Holroyd took leave, he carried away with him the memories of a dim room, a pair of magnificent dark eyes, a ditto of restless, small, white hands, and a bewitching smile. It is not certain, that he had not left a minute portion of his heart behind him. At any rate he had promised to return the following day, and bring his music, all his songs, and more especially his *duets*. His late arrival at home was the subject of much graceful badinage on the part of his brother and sister.

“Did you see Belle, and was she dressed?” enquired the latter, capering round him.

“Of course she was dressed, you little savage.”

“I am surprised to hear it. How I

wish you had caught her in her old red dressing-gown."

"Was the chair heavy?" enquired Denis.

"Weighs a ton; the old lady should really charter a pony or a donkey."

"She had a fine donkey to-day and that was yourself," returned Denis with a grin. "Fancy tooling old Mother Redmond home! Upon my word, I did not think you were so soft. Eh! what?"

CHAPTER VI.

DANGEROUS.

“ ‘ Will you walk into my parlour ? ’
Said the spider to the fly.”

HER eldest son's generous cheque had lifted a heavy load of care from Mrs. Malone's bowed shoulders. She had caulked and repaired her sinking credit, with various gratifying sums “ on account,” and although the Major bullied her out of one hundred pounds, and Denis blarneyed away twenty more, yet she contrived to pay the most pressing village bills and the servants' wages, and to purchase some much-needed garments for Cuckoo and herself. In a new bonnet and gown, she was a comparatively happy woman, when she

carried her soldier son round to call on the neighbourhood—on the Mahons of the Glen, the Lynches of Newton-Girly, the Moores of Roskeen, Miss Dopping and the Finnys. Mrs. Finny—who was as much too sweet as her daughter was the reverse—clasped her bony hands, ecstatically, in Mrs. Malone's face, as she welcomed her, and brought a tinge of red into George Holroyd's tanned cheek, by saying: "So *good* of you, my dear, kind friend, to bring your handsome son to see us."

Mrs. Malone's handsome son needed no introduction to Noone, and was perfectly competent to find his way there alone! He had received several cups of tea from the fair hands of Belle—little did he suspect the claws that were at the end of those soft, white fingers—how should he? Belle was on her best, her

very best behaviour—and he had lunched there once, in company with Denis, on rabbit pie, bottled gooseberries, and rhubarb wine—yet lived to tell the tale ! but on no occasion had he come across the girl who had wheeled the bath-chair. Nor, to be perfectly frank, did he miss her.

After a long morning's tramp over bogs and marshes, the dark November afternoons were somewhat difficult to dispose of (a late dinner has its drawbacks), and it was not altogether unpleasant to stroll across to Noone, and sit over its drawing-room fire, with a brilliant companion, who always remembered that he took no sugar, and very little cream ; sang tender love songs, and sparkling French chansons, with considerable expression ; told amusing anecdotes with much vivacity and gesticulation, and

enrolled him in a kind of delightful, confidential, companionship.

They knew so many mutual military acquaintances, and military stations, and both were aliens to this monotonous rural existence. Belle was vivacious in appreciative company, related malicious tales of her neighbours, flattered him discreetly about his singing and shooting, and told him, with a sigh, that he reminded her so forcibly of a very great friend of hers, who, she subsequently let fall, was as handsome as a god!—and yet people said that Belle was not clever and that Betty had ten times her brains. Whilst this merry young couple laughed and talked and sang, Mrs. Redmond dozed over her knitting, or woke up with a start, to gaze at the animated faces at the tea table, and to watch George Holroyd furtively, with a cun-

ning, predatory glance out of her little yellowish eyes. Would anything come of *this*? she wondered. She was desperately anxious about her daughter's future. At her death Noone reverted to another branch of the family, and her beautiful, helpless, hot-tempered Belle would be left to face the world with a very scanty income. Her own life, she knew, could not be prolonged. She was in the deadly grip of a fatal malady, and if she could only see Belle well married, she would die happy and with her mind at rest, but Belle was "getting on," and was, alas! still Miss Redmond. And she bent all her energies to screwing and scraping every spare halfpenny, in order to leave her daughter a better provision when she herself had passed away. Now and then, she had reluctantly fitted her out for a short

campaign in England, for a tour of what proved to be barren visits, remaining herself at Noone, to count the potatoes and sods of turf, and to subsist on rabbits and herrings. The mere act of putting by one sovereign after another, soon became her keenest pleasure, and the enjoyment grew stronger the more it was indulged in, though she always assured herself that this feverish gathering in of shillings and pound notes had nothing to do with a love of money, but solely with her love of Belle ! Belle herself had no anxieties about her future. She had made up her mind to marry George Holroyd and accompany him to India—her promised land. She was a young woman of some decision where her own interests were concerned, and possessed a considerable fund of tenacity—in spite of which several of her admirers had

detached themselves, and escaped ;—and, although she was by no means in love with her new acquaintance, she was enamoured of his profession and his prospects, and her restless spirit yearned for the perpetual changes of scene insured to an officer's wife. Visions of gay cantonments, and still gayer hill stations, rose before her mental eye—visions in which she saw herself living in a whirl of balls, theatricals, and picnics, the queen of society, the best-looking, best dressed, and most admired of her sex ; with legions of generals, aide-de-camps, yea, and commissioners, figuratively, at her feet. With each visit George paid, these dreams assumed more real and brilliant hues. Woe, woe, be to the hand that would dispel them, and condemn her to damp dreary Noone, and the society of the Finneys, and

Malones, for life—a life that to Belle, with her intense vitality, and quenchless craving for excitement, would be simply a living death !

George Holroyd was really quite amazed to find what rapid strides he had made in intimacy with the Redmonds. We know how easily the great leviathan may be led, when once a hook is in his nose ! and how simple it is for any idle young man to become entangled in the web of a pretty and experienced flirt. He began to feel almost apologetic and uncomfortable, when his mother regularly enquired at dinner “where he had been ?”

And he replied as punctually : “Over to Noone,” or, “I just looked in at Noone,” “I had tea at Noone.”

Cuckoo’s ill-bred titter, and Denis’s wink, were not lost upon him, much

less the Major's ponderous chaff, and constant regret that "he was not a young man, for Belle Redmond's sake." Belle was a pleasant companion for an hour or so, but George was not thinking of her as a companion for life.

He had discovered that she was a young lady that one came to the end of very soon. She was smart, sparkling and pretty; her animated gestures, and the playful little stamp of her foot, were all very taking in their way; but she was shallow, restless, and spiteful, and had a singularly foolish laugh. True that to him she was undeniably sweet—sweet as Turkish delight—but then, with most people, a little of that cloying dainty goes a long way.

In his guilty heart, this miserable young man knew that he was daily expected to tea at Noone; that he already

had his own particular chair, and tea cup, and that he had given Belle a quantity of new songs, a belt of his regimental colours, and his photograph in two positions ; but surely, he would argue with himself, she was a sensible girl, and too well accustomed to society and the ways of the world, to suppose that these were more than the most ordinary attentions, and, then, Mrs. Redmond had been very civil to *him*, and given him “*carte blanche*” to come and shoot rabbits whenever he pleased. Crafty old person ! She sold the rabbits in the town for sevenpence apiece, or hung them in the larder, and saved her butcher’s bill.

To tell the truth, she and Mrs. Maccabe, the butcher’s relict and successor in the business, were not on very friendly terms. If the Malones’ bills were alarmingly

long, Mrs. Redmond's were pitifully small.

"A pound and a half of neck chops, is it, ma'am?" Mrs. Maccabe would scream. "No, ma'am, *not* to-day; you've had chops for the last three months. I suppose ye think the shape is made of chops, but let me inform you, ma'am, that you are under a mistake. Shape has legs and loins, and fore-quarters; you can take one of them, or go without."

And then Mrs. Maccabe, a powerful, formidable matron, in a large black bonnet, would seize an ox tail, kept for the purpose, and lay about her vigorously among the listening, sniggering street urchins, whilst Mrs. Redmond would stalk back majestically to her bath-chair—and subsequently send a pencilled order for a sheep's head. Mrs. Maccabe was an authority in the town; even her grown-

up married sons quailed before her tongue and her ox tail, and Maria Finny (herself a fearless speaker) stood in respectful awe of the butcher's widow.

"One day," to quote that championess, who related the story with virtuous complacency, "she made a holy show of Miss Finny before the whole street." Maria, on frugal thoughts intent, had stepped in to remonstrate about a bit of gristle which she produced carefully wrapped in paper. "Av course, I know that to please *some* people bastes must be made without skin, and sinews and bone. Weigh it, Sam!" shouted Mrs. Maccabe to her son. "*One* ounce. Cut Miss Maria an ounce of mate!"

"There, miss," solemnly presenting it in paper, "I daresay it will serve you for a dinner."

Maria flung the packet into the middle

of the street, and followed it in a fury, whilst her opponent placed her hands upon her fat sides and shook with wheezy laughter.

The widow had her good points, of course, or she would have had but few customers, on whom to sharpen her terrible tongue. Indeed her poorer patrons did not care a straw for her abuse, and paid her honestly in her own coin, with ruthless and ready answers. She was most charitable in secret, and many a fine chop and steak, and many a strong bowl of broth, was given away *quite* on the sly. She was long-suffering to those who were really badly off, a devout Catholic, and a liberal contributor to her own Church: besides this, her meat was prime—unsurpassed in the whole province—and no better judge of a beast ever stood in a fair than Bridget Maccabe. As the poor

innocent animals passed unconsciously before her, she could tell to a pound how they would cut up ! Her purchases were young, healthy, and well-fed ; she scorned to deal in tough old, milch cows, and skinny strippers, and boasted that no second-class joint ever hung beneath the sign of “B. Maccabe and Sons.”

During the days in which George Holroyd had developed so brisk an acquaintance with Noone, he had never once come across Betty Redmond. She was not kept out of his way in the upper or lower regions (as might be suspected), in case her claims to attention should clash with those of her cousin. Oh dear, no ! Belle had no sincerer admirer. Betty was her willing drudge : she sewed for her, brought her breakfast in bed, and ran her errands with alacrity, Belle

accepting these services with smiling thanks, and honeyed speeches. Her cheap fascinations secured for her a devoted attendant, and saved her a lady's-maid.

Betty, who had known Ballingoole, and everyone in the neighbourhood, all her life, was quite at home in comparison with Mrs. Redmond and her daughter. She spent her holidays there, and looked forward to her visits to Noone, as if she were going direct to an earthly paradise. She loved the country, whether in summer or winter. She loved old "Playboy," the bay hunter who had taught her to ride, and now lay buried at the end of the orchard. She was fond of the dogs, the cart horses, the very cows.

She was also fond, in a way, of old Uncle Brian, with his goggle eyes, red face, and loud voice, but here her love was somewhat tempered by fear. He set

her on horseback when she was seven years old, and flogged old "Playboy," over big fences, in order to teach her to ride like an Irishwoman, and he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, when the chestnut filly kicked her off in the lawn, and went away with the best half of her habit. He took her out with him when he went snipe shooting, to make her active and hardy ; nor dare she flinch, before the deepest, blackest bog-drain, and he taught her to play backgammon and cribbage, and swore at her roundly if she made a mistake. "To be afraid of nothing, to speak the truth, and to pull up her stockings," were the injunctions which he enforced on his grand-niece. He left other matters to her instructors at the English school.

When Betty was sixteen, her Uncle Brian died quite suddenly of apoplexy,

said to have been induced by a fit of furious passion, and when she returned to Noone, her heart sank within her, for a new mistress was coming, and she expected great changes. The new mistress was an Englishwoman, with a pretty daughter, and both were total strangers to Ballingoole and Betty.

Betty went mournfully round the place in her new black dress, accompanied by her intimate friends, "Brown," "Jones," and "Robinson." There had been an auction of all the stock and out-door effects ; the yard was full of straw, and bits of boxes and newspapers ; the stables, byre, and coach house were empty ; the house itself, how dreary and forlorn ; at every turn she missed old Uncle Brian, with his loud voice and tapping stick, and was very miserable indeed, till Miss Dopping came that afternoon, and carried

her away to her own home, and subsequently to visit the Moores of Roskeen.

A week or two later, Mrs. Redmond arrived, inquisitive, astute, agreeable—prepared to tolerate Betty, and to tolerate the dogs—and to make a little money out of both !

But Betty was a delightful surprise ; a bright, clever, active girl, full of good humour and energy, who knew the ways of the place, and was most useful in the house, and took to Belle—and, what was more important, Belle took to her—immediately.

Far from being set on one side, Betty was an influential personage, and her aunt's domestic viceroy and right hand. She had not been visible at the tea-table, simply because she never partook of afternoon tea. Her Uncle Brian had called it a "kitchen-maid's custom," and she liked

being out of doors until it was almost dark. At present she spent all her afternoons with Miss Dopping, who had been laid up with a bad cold ever since her visit to Noone, and Mrs. Redmond gladly spared her niece, for two reasons ; firstly, because she did not want her ; secondly, because she had her weather-eye fixed on Miss Dopping's money bags. The old lady was fond of Betty, was as wealthy as she was eccentric, and had no near kin. If Betty became a rich heiress, it would be a capital thing for Belle !

CHAPTER VII.

ONLY JONES.

“Some griefs are med’cinable.”

—CYMBELINE.

GEORGE HOLROYD had fain to be content with the Ballingoole Harriers, instead of the Ward-Union and Meath hounds ; his poverty but not his will consented to this pitiable change. However, even Harriers must be followed on horseback, and up to the present, although the Major had been making constant enquiries among his own immediate connections, and many sporting friends, no suitable steed was secured. A large number of the blind, the maimed, the halt, had been forthcoming, had been submitted for inspection, each and all a dead bargain, each

sold as a personal favour to George, and for *no* fault, so the Major expressively stated upon what he was pleased to call "his sacred word of honour." George, who rode well, and recognised a decent horse when he saw it, at last grew tired of this farce, and said :

"I always thought that Ireland was the country for good horses. Where are they? I never saw such a set of old screws—that one," pointing to a discarded charger, "is like an old hair trunk, and has not a tooth in his head. My bump of veneration would forbid my getting on his back."

"If you will go to a couple of hundred guineas," said the Major (who loved not his step-son), "I'll engage to get you a flyer—a chaser."

"Thanks—but sixty is my limit, and as I am a light-weight I ought to be

able to pick up something that will carry me for a couple of months."

"There was that bay horse of Cooney's—he is cheap enough! You tried him one day with the Harriers."

"Yes, but I don't care about an animal that expects you to carry his head home, after a very mild day's sport."

"Well, I believe I know of one, but he is a good way off, that won't ask you to carry *his* head, but that takes it and mostly keeps it. Maybe, he will please you," said the Major huffily; "he belongs to a tenant of me cousin's, Mick Malone."

While this independent animal was being looked up, George passed his time in shooting snipe, sunning himself in Miss Redmond's smiles, and thinning her mother's rabbits. One day, as he was tramping through the wet woods, accom-

panied by "lodge" Pat, laden with dead bunnies, he noticed through a glade, what looked like a black figure—the figure of a woman. As any figure was an unusual sight in the upper plantations, he halted, stared, and finally advanced towards her—a girl in an old waterproof and black felt hat, with masses of loose brown hair, kneeling on the damp moss, and occasionally laying her head on the ground! "An escaped lunatic!" Also two very anxious fox terriers sniffing and yelping and running circles round her.

"It's Miss Betty," ejaculated Pat, and the sound of his voice made her spring to her feet, and confront them.

It was Miss Betty, the bath-chair girl; and how plain she was! Her hair was tumbling over her shoulders; her face was deadly white; her eyes dim and watery with crying; her nose the colour

of a ripe tomato ; an unbecoming old hat ; a raw November day—of a truth, Betty Redmond had never looked worse !

“Can I be of any assistance ? Is anything the matter ?” enquired George politely, as he doffed his deerstalker.

“Yes, of course there is !” she gasped out hysterically. “It’s *Jones* ! He has been in a rabbit-hole since yesterday.”

Mr. Holroyd had never been formally introduced to the dogs ; they were always out with Betty, and he was more than ever confirmed in his first impression.

“And Aunt Emma does not care, nor feel it one bit,” she continued passionately. “She says he will come out of himself ; perhaps she will be sorry when he is dead, and she loses his legacy.”

Strange, he thought, that even Maria Finny had never mentioned that Miss Elizabeth Redmond was out of her mind.

“Do not excite yourself,” he said, soothingly. “It will be all right, I am sure ; just leave it in my hands, and I will see after him—if you will only allow me to take you home first.”

Could a professional mad doctor say more ? he thought, with warm self-approval.

“Go home,” she echoed, stamping her foot. “And leave him here to die—he that is so fond of me—that is my very shadow—that loves me better than anything in the world. What do you think I am made of ?—a block of stone ? No, never. I will stay here till he is brought out, either dead or alive—if I stay for a week. Well, what are you waiting for ? If you want to be of some use, you might dig.”

“Sure it’s only a dog, sir,” explained Pat, as he looked up into his employer’s

sorely perplexed countenance. "It's only Jones, and 'tis himself is a born devil for hunting rabbits, and going to ground like any ferret."

"Oh, Mr. Holroyd, you offered to help ; help me to dig him out," said the girl, seizing a spade. "I will do anything for you if you will only save him. Pat, I will give you five shillings ! he is choking in there," she went on distractedly. "Listen to his bark, how faint it is, fainter than it was an hour ago. He is dying, I am sure of it." And she burst into fresh tears.

George Holroyd leant his gun against a tree, and promptly took hold of a spade, and commenced operations with a will. Beauty in distress must ever appeal to the heart of a young man ; only this was not Beauty—far from it—but Beauty's cousin—besides, George loved dogs, and

he worked with all his zeal and strength for the sake of the sporting little terrier, whilst Pat laboured and grubbed, and carried out earth with hard horny hands. After twenty minutes' incessant toil, through moss and roots, and frost-bound earth, there was a scream of delight from Betty, and a very dirty, frightened terrier struggled forth, and was clasped instantly in her arms.

“Oh, you bad, bad dog,” she murmured ecstatically, as she kissed the top of his head: “how dare you give me such a fright? What should we have done if you had been lost, and spoiled the set? You shall be kept in the stable for a week, on bread and water, for this.”

And she set him down to receive the boisterous congratulations of “Brown” and “Robinson.”

“I don’t know how to thank you,” she said, now turning to Mr. Holroyd —“nor Pat.—Pat, come up to the house this evening for your five shillings.”

“And my reward,” enquired George. “I worked twice as hard as Pat !” Thinking that despite her fiery nose and eyes, she had pretty white teeth and a singularly sweet smile. “You know you said I might have anything I asked for.”

“Oh ! that was in the agonies of the moment !”

“Then you would repudiate your offer. Miss Betty, I am surprised at you !”

“No, no, I never, as the people here say, ‘go back from my word ;’ only I have so little worth offering,” now following happy Pat, who slouched along, laden with the gun and rabbits. “I have no possessions of the smallest value, nothing but an old watch that goes for about

three hours, and a battered locket, that Jones has chewed."

"Well, I will not enforce my claim now. I shall bide my time, and remind you of your promise some day. Perhaps I had better have it down in writing?"

"Perhaps you had," she answered with a laugh.

"You appear to be very fond of dogs," he remarked, as he walked beside her.

"I am indeed. I look upon them almost as if they were my relations. I have——" and she paused.

"You were going to say something," he suggested politely.

"I have so few relations."

"Mrs. and Miss Redmond."

"Very distant connections by marriage. I have one uncle in India, whom I have never seen; he is my only near kith or kin."

“Perhaps what you lack in relatives, you make up in friends ; some people think *they* are the best of the two.”

“Yes, I am very well off for friends—friends among my school-fellows, and friends over here—there are the Moores of Roskeen, and the Mahon girls, and Miss Dopping, and your sister, Cuckoo.”

“Miss Dopping and Cuckoo ! What a contrast ; rather a scratch pair, as the Major would say.”

“May be so, but they suit me exactly. Miss Dopping is my house friend, and Cuckoo is my companion out of doors.”

“And have you summer and winter friends, and fine weather and wet weather friends ?”

“No, I have *no* fine weather friend ; you don’t understand. Miss Dopping is old and does not go out much. She and I like the same people in books, and we

read and talk over things, and she tells me about old times, and teaches me various matters, and lectures me now and then."

"Yes, and Cuckoo? Does she lecture you and talk about old times?"

"No, indeed, *I* lecture her; we run after the Harriers together, and botanise, and go nutting, and black-berrying."

George began to think that a walk with this original girl was an agreeable novelty, and was rather sorry to see the garden walls of Noone looming through the trees. In a narrow path leading from the garden gate, they nearly fell over Lodge Juggy, with her apron very full of something, and if she could be said to blush—she blushed, as she stood right in their way, dropping hurried courtesies.

"Oh, Juggy," exclaimed Betty, "where are you going; what have you got there?"

“Just a lock of old cabbage laves for the pig, miss, that Mike was throwing out.”

“What small cabbages—they are the shape of potatoes,” said Betty, looking steadily at Juggy’s apron.

“Well, there is a couple or so, and I won’t deny it, miss, but sure, times is hard, terribly hard, Miss Betty, and *you* mind the days when your uncle was alive, when I went to mass on me own ass’s car, and kept a couple of pigs !”

“And what has happened to you, Juggy ? ” enquired George, sympathetically.

“Well, sir, ever since I offended the Lord and Mrs. Redmond, I’m in a poor way. Sure, I get nothing out of the gate, but what people give me.”

“And I hope they are liberal,” said George, feeling his pocket.

“There does be no quality passing now ; times is changed, but some are not too bad at Christmas. Mrs. Mahon puts a flannel petticoat on me, and Mrs. Mac-cabe puts a couple of shifts on me, and Miss Dopping puts a pair of boots on me.”

“The Graces attiring Venus,” muttered the young man to Betty ; then louder :

“I hope you will allow me to contribute to your toilet,” placing five shillings in her ready hand. “Get yourself one or two larger and stronger aprons ; you don’t know *how* useful you may find them.”

“The Lord love your handsome face !” exclaimed Juggy, upon whom the sarcasm was completely lost. “Faix ! it’s a real trate to see a gentleman,” and, as they passed on, she struck an easy and reflective attitude, and remarked, in a tone of audible approval :

“Och ! and wouldn’t they make a lovely pair ! And wouldn’t I go ten miles on me hands and knees to see their wedding ?”

George could not restrain a smile, at the preposterous idea of coupling *him* with his present companion.

“What does she mean about offending Mrs. Redmond and the Lord ?” he enquired precipitately—trusting that Juggy’s compliments had not reached Betty’s ears.

“Oh ! it’s a long story. She has lived at the lodge for years, and some of her people are not quite respectable. One of her brothers is a poacher, and another keeps a still. She used to sell his pot-*been* on the sly, and I often wondered *why* she had so many visitors, especially on Sundays, in Uncle Brian’s time, for he was an indulgent master, and seemed to think what he called ‘Juggy’s receptions’ a great joke, but last year she

quarrelled with Foxy Joe—you know Foxy Joe ? ”

“ Yes, I am acquainted with him.”

“ Well, I believe they had some dispute about money, or whisky, and he informed on her, and told Aunt Emma that she kept a very thriving unlicensed ‘ public ’ at the lodge gate, and so, one day, when Juggy declared that she was dying of rheumatism and cold, and had sent up to her house for port wine and a little jam, Aunt Emma marched down to the lodge, about twelve o’clock at night, and made *me* go with her. We peeped in at one of the front windows, and saw the whole kitchen lit up. One of the best drawing-room lamps was on the dresser, four silver candlesticks had also been borrowed, as well as glasses, and the family punch-bowl, and Mrs. Redmond’s pet claret jug. About fifty

people were sitting round, drinking and smoking, and shouting 'more power.' There was a fiddler on the table, and Juggy herself and the Mahons' groom were dancing a frantic jig in the middle of the floor. When Mrs. Redmond flung the door back and stalked in, perhaps you can imagine the scene, for it is beyond my power of description."

"I think I can picture it," said George with a hearty laugh. "Tell me, Miss Betty, how is it that I never see you at Noone? And do you know that I am over almost every afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that, but I have had other engagements. Have you been thinking that I am a sort of Cinderella, hidden in the kitchen among the ashes?" she enquired mischievously.

"No," he stammered; but the idea had occurred to him.

“I don’t drink five o’clock tea, and I generally go over and sit with Miss Dopping, who has been ill; besides, I know that Belle is a host in herself.”

(She said this in the frank innocence of her heart, and without the faintest *arrière pensée*.)

“The more the merrier,” returned George, “we shall have your society this evening at any rate.”

“No, I think not. I have a message to take for Mrs. Redmond. You see, Jones has wasted nearly all my day,” and she came to a full stop where the pathway led to the avenue.

“Good-bye, then,” he said, “since you must go, and remember your promise.”

“Yes, I’ll remember my promise,” she answered gaily. “I am very, very much obliged to you,” and she held out her hand.

He took it in his. What a cold, slender, little hand! It gave him a grateful, cordial shake, like a hearty schoolboy, and in another second its proprietor had disappeared in the deepening dusk.

And so that was Betty! who came into a room like a blast of wind, according to Major Malone, and whom his mother had called "a beautiful, warm-hearted, young creature." Well, on the whole, he rather liked her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS DOPPING TO THE RESCUE.

“A horse, a horse ! My kingdom for a horse.”

“MISS DOPPING’S cold had taken a terrible strong hold of her,” according to the maid who issued bulletins at her hall door, and she sat cowering over the fire in what she called her “museum,” wrapped in a woollen shawl, munching liquorice ball, and reminding herself that she was seventy-five years of age, and could not expect to live for ever !

Each afternoon Betty had appeared, escorted by her dogs, all brisk and cheerful, and, whilst Brown ate biscuits, and Jones conscientiously drew the room for mice, Betty read aloud,

wound worsted, answered letters, and amused her ; but to-day, thanks to Jones's misadventure, there was no Betty, and the old lady was feeling unusually low and forlorn. Her drawing-room (or museum) was a strange apartment for an elderly spinster. If you were told that it was the sanctum of a sporting squire, you would not have been surprised, for it was essentially a man's room, from the tanned skins of defunct hunters spread about the floor, the walls covered with brushes, horse shoes, and sporting prints (prints setting forth slender-waisted riders, charging impossible rails on short-tailed thoroughbreds, or spanking coaches-and-four, or flat races) to the venerable old fox-hound, dozing on the rug.

Miss Sally Dopping came of a very horsey family, and had ruled her father's

sporting establishment for many years ; but he had been cut off by a coaching accident, and her only brother had broken his neck in a steeplechase. The Doppings generally met their deaths by flood or field ; a natural death in a four-poster would be an unnatural death to them. Miss Sally herself had followed the hounds with reckless persistence, in a black skirt and scarlet jacket ; delighting the male sex, and horrifying their wives and daughters, for a fox-hunting lady was not a common or popular spectacle fifty years ago ; but Miss Sally did not care a button for the local Mrs. Grundy. She swallowed a bowl of strong broth at eight o'clock in the morning, and set off on her well-bred, rat-tailed hunter, to the nearest meet, and enjoyed herself vastly. She paid ceremonious visits to her neighbours, in her mother's old green

chariot, and was quite as stiff and snubby to them as they were to her. Indeed, to tell the truth, they were all afraid to say much to her *face*—and she feared no one—for Sally had the reputation of having a high temper, and, it was whispered, had once boxed another lady's ears. She was an old woman now, who had outlived her generation and her relations, and was never known to lift her hand to mortal, merely contenting herself with speaking her mind *quite* plainly, and going her own way. There were no traces of "Galloping Sal" in the wealthy old maid, beyond that she was still an excellent judge of a horse, and had been known, under strong provocation, to rap out a full-bodied oath. Despite her eccentricities (which were not a few—she used a toothpick, rarely wore a cap, and had been seen sitting with her feet on the

chimneypiece), she was very popular among the county people, and in great request at their hospitable houses, and took a far higher social position than miserly Mrs. Redmond, or meek Mrs. Malone, even although she lived in the *town*! People said that she and old Brian Redmond had been lovers once, but that they had fallen out over a horse, and that that was the reason of her strong partiality for Betty; but some people will say anything.

“Was that Betty’s knock?” she said to herself.

No, “Bachelor” never growled at Betty’s step! It was Maria Finny in a damp waterproof, who, noting from over her blind that Miss Dopping’s daily visitor had failed her, ran over to see how she was getting on?

“Oh, well, I am just getting on like

all of us. *You* are getting on yourself, Maria."

"Yes," she admitted, as she removed her cloak, and drew near the fire. "But I am not getting on like Belle Redmond. I should be sorry to be a town's talk like her."

"The town is always ready to talk. I've a mind to buy a flaxen wig and a pair of pink tights, and give it something to gabble about in earnest. Well, and what has Belle been doing now?"

"She has that young Holroyd there every day of his life," returned Maria, who, having a budget of news, was speechfully happy.

"Pooh, what rubbish; he has only been here ten days, and, may be, he has nowhere else to go to—or perhaps you expect him to hang up his hat in *your* hall, Maria."

“No, Miss Dopping, you know I do not, but he is a nice gentlemanly young man, and, surely to goodness, you would not like to see him ruined for life ! He has been very liberal to his mother. She was down the street paying bills a few days after he came. I saw her myself, going into Maccabe’s and Casey’s, and she has not faced *them* for months.”

“Then why the deuce doesn’t she look after her son ? What is the fool of a woman about ? If he marries, she has seen the last of his money, and most likely the last of *him*.”

“And don’t you know Mrs. Malone by this time ?” enquired Maria contemptuously—“a poor helpless creature, all her mind is set on making things pleasant for Mr. Holroyd, keeping him and the Major on good terms, and hiding Denis and his doings from them both.”

“Will you tell me one thing, Maria Finny---*you* know what goes on in the town, if any one does. Since I am confined to the house, I am a good deal at the window.”

“You always *are*,” interrupted Maria, with her usual acid frankness. Maria neither gave nor accepted quarter. “The song—‘Only a Face at the Window,’ was surely made about you.”

“Tell me, Maria, what is Denis doing in Maccabe’s? He is in and out there like a dog in a fair. If it was a *public*, I could understand it, but butchers’ meat throws me fairly off the scent.”

“Off the scent, are you? And hasn’t Mrs. Maccabe more than beef and mutton in her shop? Hasn’t she a pretty niece?”

“Nonsense, Maria! hold your blistering, scurrilous tongue,” said the old lady,

pushing her chair back, with great violence.

“Tongue, or no tongue, I’ve an eye in my head,” returned Maria undauntedly. “Lizzie is one of your still waters, with her sleek hair, and downcast eyes, and ‘yes, Miss Finny,’ and ‘no, Miss Finny’—scarcely above her breath. She is as deep as a draw-well. I saw Denis and her walking together in the bog road last Sunday.”

“Then, by my oath, if her aunt knew it, she would just flay her alive,” said Miss Dopping, excitedly.

“I daresay she would ! But never mind Lizzie just now ; trust me, there will be enough about *her* by and by, or I am much mistaken. Do you know that the Major is going on with his tricks, and his betting, worse than ever ? Jane Bolland says that he sends as many

as six telegrams a day—and always about racing. There will be a fine ruction there soon, and George Holroyd will have to support the whole family. If he marries Belle Redmond, he will have his hands full. When she is in a passion, she is like a madwoman; she threw a lighted candle at Katey Brady, they say, for spoiling a petticoat, and indeed I think there must be a touch of madness in the family. She is so restless, and fond of gay colours, and has the eyes and laugh of a woman who would go out of her mind for very little. I pity George Holroyd.”

“He will never marry her, Maria,” rejoined Miss Dopping emphatically.

“*She* will marry him, and it comes to the same thing,” returned Maria, with great determination. “They have a fire in the drawing-room every day, and she

wears her best clothes, and walks back with him through the woods with a shawl over her head, leaning on his arm too ! and is always sending him notes by Foxy Joe. I went over there myself one day, with a collecting card ; of course *that* was a fool's errand ! but I wanted to see how the land lay, and indeed," with a sniff of virtuous scorn, "I saw enough ! I wonder if Mr. Holroyd knows about that officer in the Sky Blues !"

"Not he," replied Miss Dopping in her sharpest key. "If he must take a wife from Noone, why does he not take Betty ?"

"Betty ! that wild slip, running about the country with Cuckoo, after every old fern, and fossil ?"

"And is it not more respectable than to be running after a young man ?" en-

quired the other forcibly. "She is eighteen, she is well educated, and she really *is* a lady."

"She is only an awkward slip of a girl ; her eyes and hair are not too bad, but *I* call her very plain, with her thin cheeks and pasty face."

"Plain !" echoed Miss Dopping, shrilly.

"Yes, and what else ?" retorted Maria, stoutly.

"Just listen to *me*, Maria. Old Robert Lynch, who was a terrible man for the ladies in his day, and the best of judges, saw her once, and said that in a year or two, she will be able to give two stone and a beating to any girl in the country. He said he would keep his eye on her."

"I would not doubt him, the old scamp ! Bob Lynch ought to be thinking of his sins, and of his latter

end, instead of talking trash," said Maria, severely. "However, Betty is not out yet."

"And when she does come out," retorted her champion, "you'll find there will be a half-a-dozen young men waiting on the steps to marry her—and so George is at Noone every day?"

"Yes, for hours," replied Miss Finny, in a tone that was almost tragic.

"Well, I see only two chances for him—and they are either to break his neck, or to run away from that scheming, brazen creature."

"I know he is asked to Goole for the cock shooting, and to the Kaness' for hunting," continued Maria confidentially, "for Jane Bolland noticed the postmarks and crests. It is a grand thing for a young man to come into this part of the world, where bachelors are scarce and

girls are in dozens. Mrs. Malone showed me a whole row of notes, waiting for him on the chimneypiece, and really, the first Sunday he was in church, the way the girls flocked round him afterwards—by the way of speaking to his mother—was shameless ! The Rodes, the Lynches, and the Wildes, that scarcely look at her from year's end to year's end."

"Why does he not go off hunting?" enquired Miss Dopping. "He must be a queer sort of a molly-coddle of a young man, if *that* does not tempt him."

"He has no horse yet ; the Major has been trying to sell him every old screw in the country, but he is too sharp for him and so——"

"And so he goes over and idles, and risks himself at Noone ; I see. Well, he is a pleasant young fellow, and was very civil, even to an old hag like me, so I'll

do my best for him. I will get the Moores to ask him over, and I'll speak a word to the Major! And now, Maria, that will do for to-day. I am not very strong, and a little of *you* goes a long way. There is your cloak, there is your umbrella; good-bye, and don't bang the front-door."

As soon as the same door had been shut, with a violence that shook the plaster from the ceiling (for Maria was not pleased), Miss Dopping hurried over to the seat she always occupied in the window, drew her shawl over her head, and peered into the street. She frequently sat in this nook, watching passers-by, and knocked loudly on the pane at any she specially wished to see, usually — almost always — *men*. She vastly preferred their society to that of her own sex, and openly gloried in the

fact. Major Malone, Dr. Doran, Sir Forbes Gould, Lord Mudrath, the Parish Priest, were indiscriminately summoned in from time to time, to have a talk and a glass of good wine—and came right willingly. She was an aggressively hospitable old lady. No one was permitted to leave her house without partaking of some refreshment, whether it was port wine and a biscuit, a cup of tea and seed cake, or even a glass of milk ! To refuse was to offend her seriously. The very drivers who brought her visitors on hack cars were sure of a bottle of porter. Eating and drinking was in her opinion, an outward and visible token of inward goodwill. Now she sits in the window, watching for the Major, and here he comes at last, rolling out of the post office. She rapped at him sharply with her knuckles, and soon afterwards his red face, and

ample waistcoat, presented themselves in the doorway.

“Sit down, Major,” said his hostess effusively, “sit down; come over near the fire and tell me all the news. You are a great stranger these times, a great stranger.”

“Upon my word, Miss Sally,” rubbing his hands briskly, “I haven’t a word of news, good or bad. Have you?”

“What! and you only just out of the post office! Oh! come, come. Have you heard that your step-son is making great running over at Noone? How would you like Belle for a daughter-in-law?”

“Faith,” drawing forth and flourishing a silk handkerchief, “I admire his taste.”

“Well, it’s more than I do,” said Miss Dopping acrimoniously; “an idle, useless,

ornamental hussey, that never gets out of bed till twelve in the day, and that can't do a hand's turn beyond trimming a bonnet, and squalling French songs—and I am not saying *anything* about her temper. However, he has private means and he will want them all——”

“Oh, he is not serious,” interrupted the Major, speaking hastily, and with visible alarm. “There is nothing in it, upon my sacred word of honour. Of course, he admires Belle, we all do ; he is not a marrying man ; he has no idea of marrying.”

“But *she* has, and he is always there, singing and tea-drinking ; more by token he has nothing else to do.”

“I'm after a horse for him, but he is so plaguey hard to please.”

“Yes, he's not to be pleased with one of your old garrons ; and let me tell

you this, Tom Malone, that if you can't put your hand on something better soon, it's a lady's hack he will be wanting."

"I see," nodding his head several times. "The wind of the word is enough for Tom Malone. I'll write to my cousin to-night. I don't want the poor fellow to be hooked like that," he added, with a keen sense of favours to come. "I'll write——No, by Jove, as I am near the post office, I'll telegraph! I'll just run over now."

The Major's running was of course a mere figure of speech, a sort of hurried waddle; he lost no time and clattered downstairs, and speedily despatched the following message to his cousin, Mike Malone :

"Rail at once your artillery mare, or Clancy's colt. Leave price to me. Guaran-

tee satisfaction"; to which an answer came that same evening: "Mare sold, am sending Clancy's colt."

CHAPTER IX.

CLANCY'S COLT.

“His manliness won every heart.”

—ASHLEY.

BEHOLD a lovely morning in late November—a morning borrowed from Spring, as bright and sunny as if it had been advanced by the liberal month of May. True, that as yet there had been but little frost, that the South of Ireland is proverbially mild, and the pleasure-ground at Bridgetstown a notoriously sheltered and favoured spot. Chrysanthemums—yellow and brown—still braved the nipping wintry air, hollyhocks, dahlias, and pale monthly roses as yet held up their heads; laurels and holly glistened in seasonable green, and a gorgeous Virginia

creeper flaunted along the grey garden wall.

On such a morning, George Holroyd came whistling across the pleasure-ground in search of his mother. She was extremely fond of flowers, and if hoarding up shilling to shilling was Mrs. Redmond's passion, and deepest earthly enjoyment, grubbing, transplanting, nursing, and potting was hers. George swung back the garden gate, till it shivered on its hinges, and beheld his mother, and a tall girl, promenading along the central gravel walk. His mother was leaning upon her companion's arm, and carried an earthy trowel in one hand—they were evidently engaged in earnest conversation. On hearing the gate slam, they both turned towards him, and could it be possible that his mother's *confidante* was Betty Redmond? For a moment he doubted

her identity, so great was the difference between smiles and tears—between a wild rose complexion and a countenance sodden and swollen with crying—between a dull misty afternoon, and a brilliant morning. The sun brought out the bronze tints of Betty's brown hair, and was reflected in the depths of her deep grey eyes—eyes of that mystic shade, that can be soft with joy or love, brimming with sympathy, dancing with mirth, or dark as night with grief or jealousy. Such eyes are wont to dazzle, and into their depths it is most dangerous for a young man to gaze, unless he would be their slave for life. Luckily for mankind, the power of these eyes was unknown to their possessor ; to her, they were merely a pair of useful organs, that saw well, slept well, and wept well—to the latter George Holroyd could bear testimony.

Betty had discarded her waterproof, and wore a well-fitting blue serge gown, a black straw sailor's hat, in which was jauntily stuck two bits of scarlet geranium, the very last of the season. She was tall and slight, and as George looked, he agreed with his mother—Betty Redmond was beautiful. Hers was a style that bore a searching light, the open air, the bold unflattering sun. Belle looked best in dim rose-shaded lamplight, or within the circuit of a fire, whose blaze was reproduced in her magnificent dark orbs. Belle was a brilliant hot-house azalea, and Betty a bit of white mountain heather.

It is true that her nose was not as neatly chiselled as her cousin's, and that her small white teeth were somewhat irregular ; nevertheless Betty was a pretty girl and found great favour in George

Holroyd's eyes ; but whether she was a "warm-hearted young creature" he had yet to discover.

"This is my son, George," explained Mrs. Malone proudly. "George, don't you know Betty ? I mean Miss Elizabeth Redmond."

"Yes," replied George. "I have already had the pleasure of making her acquaintance. I helped her to excavate a treasure in the upper wood at Noone."

Betty coloured to her brow, for his eyes were looking straight into hers, with an expression that confused and vexed her—an expression of undisguised admiration.

"I am fortunate in meeting you, Miss Betty," he continued, "for it strikes me, that we are like the little couple in the weather-glass house : when I am here, you are at Noone ; when I am at Noone, you are here."

“I come over to read with Cuckoo two mornings a week ; we take it month about—it is my turn to come to her,” returned the girl, looking at him steadily.

If Mr. Holroyd was going to stare at her in that odd way, she would dislike him extremely. Mr. Holroyd read her haughty young face like a book. What a pretty mouth and chin she had—a pretty mouth that looked as if it could speak proud things !

“I wish you would allow me to come and do lessons with you,” he returned with a smile. “I am shockingly ignorant, my spelling is shaky, and my geography deplorable.”

“I think it more likely we should learn from you ; you have seen so much of the world, and so many strange places and people, I am sure you could teach us a great deal.”

“I could teach you Hindustani and the new sword exercise, and how to load cartridges.”

“Ah ! I am afraid that your instruction would be wasted on us,” she answered, looking after Mrs. Malone, who had been hurried off to the hotbed by Joe the gardener.

“May I ask what you are doing ?” he enquired, glancing at a hammer and some pieces of scarlet cloth she held in her hand. “Have you been cutting up the Major’s uniform ?”

“I have been nailing up the Cloth of Gold rose, which the wind has blown down ; but you see there are some trails that I could not reach,” pointing to them as she spoke.

In another instant, George was on the ladder, receiving nails and bits of cloth, and particular directions, gazing down into a

pair of beautiful upturned eyes. The full effect of a pair of exquisite upturned eyes must be experienced to be appreciated ! George studied them gravely. Something told him that it was no ordinary maiden who held the ladder ; he must not flirt with this innocent inexperienced girl. No, no ; Honour stood by with her finger on her lips.

“ You seem to know your way about here pretty well,” he observed, *apropos* of Bridgetstown, when they had conversed with frank companionship for some time.

“ Yes, I am quite at home. I have been coming here since I was a little thing. Your mother calls me her eldest daughter.”

“ Then I am your brother, of course.”

“ No, no, that does not follow by any means ; you are a stranger at Ballingooole.”

“ Yes, I know I am only a mere Englishman, but I hope I shall be presented with

the freedom of the town. Mrs. Finny assures me that I am an honoured and distinguished visitor."

"What would be the good of the freedom of the town? It is a stagnant little place; we have no excitements; and you are a soldier—a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"That is true, I am a rolling stone, and don't care much about the moss."

"You like the life, then?"

"Yes, I could not conceive any other; it suits me down to the ground."

"And what will you do when you are what the Major calls 'kicked out?'"

"I am sure I don't know; loaf round, I suppose, until it is time to die!"

"And how did you like Mrs. Finny?" enquired Betty with a sly smile; "did she made you any sweet speeches?"

"She made me *blush*! a thing I have not

done for years ! Butter should be applied in small quantities, with a delicate silver knife, and not administered by the half-pound with a trowel. However, it pleased my mother."

" *Only* your mother ? " with merry incredulous eyes.

" Yes, my sensitive nature, and highly-strung nerves——"

" Your what ? " she interrupted, and they both burst out laughing. Mrs. Malone heard the laugh, at the bottom of the garden—and was delighted to think that her handsome soldier son and her favourite visitor were getting on so well.

At this instant the garden gate again opened with a clang, and admitted the graceful and vivacious Cuckoo.

" George ! " she screamed. " Oh ! there you are ; what *are* you doing up the ladder ? "

"Looking for birds' nests, as you may see !"

"Cuckoo !" exclaimed Betty tragically, "it is not *possible* that you are out in your new shoes ?"

"Yes, I'm in a hurry. I have something to tell George, something he would like to hear. Only he is so rude that I think I shall keep him waiting, marking time, as *he* calls it."

"I rude !" he echoed ; "my good Cuckoo, you are joking."

"Yes, you know you called me a little pig only yesterday."

"But of course I meant a *pretty* little pig," he rejoined as he carefully selected a nail, and drove it into the wall. "What are your tidings, fairest of the fair ?"

"A horse has come for you—such a beauty ?"

"By Jove, you don't say so !" jumping

down as he spoke. "Everything comes to him who waits !"

"Yes. But I heard the man that brought him telling Knox, not to go near his heels, for he was a born devil, but that the Major wouldn't mind *that*, and he winked ; why did he wink, George ?"

"Where did he come from ?" enquired her brother as eagerly as a boy of ten. "He is not an old friend, is he ?"

"He came from near Cousin Mick's ; he belongs to a man named Clancy—a tenant of his."

"Let us go and inspect him, instantly, Miss Redmond, that is if you care about looking at him ; but any one who is so devoted to dogs *must* be fond of horses."

Betty admitted the impeachment, and they hurried towards the house, whilst Cuckoo went shrieking down the garden :

“Mother ! mother ! come and look at George’s new horse.”

In a very short time, the whole establishment was collected on the lawn, surveying the recent arrival, with critical eyes. The Major with his legs very wide apart, and a toothpick in his mouth, carried on a whispered conversation with a pale-faced little man, in extraordinary tight trousers, now holding his head this side, and now on that, like a crow peeping down a marrow bone.

Every male about the place, from the groom to the message boy, was assembled in solemn conclave, for is not every Irishman born into the world with “an eye for a horse ?”

The animal under inspection came out of the ordeal nobly. He proved to be young, well-bred, and sound ; a fine up-standing iron grey, five off, with lots of

bone below the knee, plenty of room for his bellows, and grand quarters.

And although Sam the groom said, "his colour was against him," and Tom, the message boy, "suspicioned him of a splint," and he had not "sufficient quality" to please Joe the gardener, yet on the whole, the verdict was in his favour, and he was pronounced to be "a shocking fine colt."

But his price ! Well his price was surprisingly low, and was possibly accounted for by his rolling eye, and extremely animated manners.

According to the little wizened groom who led him (by preference) "he was an outrageous lepper, and could jump a town, was never known to turn his head from anything, and had a cruel turn of speed."

Being requested to canter him quietly round the lawn, and exhibit his paces, he

refused with considerable decision. He declared that he had the lumbago so badly he could not sit in a saddle, and had not been on a horse's back for months.

"Let the gentleman throw a leg across the harse, and try him for himself."

The gentleman, who was greatly taken with the animal, was nothing loth, and promptly advanced to mount him.

"Take him aisy, your honour," muttered the groom, as he let down the stirrup leathers. "Take him kindly, he is young, and ye must just *flatter* him a bit at the first go off."

But the horse scornfully refused to be taken aisy or flattered. He had been standing for some time, and was possibly cold, and certainly impatient; he had not been ridden for weeks (for reasons known to his groom).

Consequently when he was mounted and

let go, he lashed out with his heels in a manner that rapidly scattered his admirers, made two vicious buck jumps, and then bolted ; going immediately down the avenue, at the rate of twenty miles an hour.

“And the gate is shut !” gasped Mrs. Malone, as she clutched Betty’s arm, convulsively ; “the gate—the iron gate.”

Betty stood still and held her breath ; they all stood and gazed, in expectation of some horrible catastrophe ; for the avenue gate was over four feet high, with strong spikes along the top bar.

“Thank God,” exclaimed Mrs. Malone, breaking a painful silence, as the grey, who had a fall of the ground with him, sailed over it like a deer.

“At last he can leap,” remarked Sam the groom, wiping the perspiration off his forehead with his sleeve.

"And where is he *now*?" asked the Major in an angry voice.

"He is away up the Roskeen Road," shouted Tom, who had swarmed up a tree. "Faix, he nearly did it *that* time; he was just into Mrs. Maccabe's cart. Hurroo! the Captain has got a pull at him, and is taking him across country, he—he has gone slap through Dooley's haggard and potato garden, and begorra, —now, now he is making for the canal."

And with this cheering announcement, Tom climbed down, declaring that he could see nothing more.

In less than half-an-hour George and the grey came trotting back, intact, and apparently on the best of terms with one another, although they were both very hot; the grey had lost two shoes, and his rider his cap.

“He has no more mouth than a stone wall,” said George as he got off. “But he *can’t* fall. He took Dooley’s boundary as if it were a cart rut. I’ve knocked the conceit out of him a bit; he was heading for the canal, but when he found it was all the same to me, he shut off steam.”

“George, my dear boy, what a terrible horse!” cried Mrs. Malone. “I was sure you would have been killed, when he went at the gate.”

“Yes, like the old lady I thought that ‘every moment would be my next,’ till I discovered that he could jump. He is all right, mother, he only wants exercise, there is no fear of me. And I mean to buy him.”

“Your father was a splendid rider, George; no horse ever conquered him. You take after him, I see.” And she

looked at her handsome, eager-eyed son with an air of melancholy pride.

“What do *you* say to him, Miss Betty?” he enquired. “You shall ride him if you like, some of these days, when he is better bitted, and broken.”

“Betty is a nailer to ride. She’d back anything,” volunteered Denis in his gruff voice.

“He is not a lady’s horse,” objected the Major, “though handling and exercise is all he wants. Only for this gout of mine I’d buy him myself, and have him as quiet as a sheep by the end of the week; it’s all hands, sir, hands—and I don’t think much of *yours*. Eh! what? what?”

The Major was sorely vexed at George’s success, and the unmistakable admiration that his riding had evoked, from a notoriously critical class. The Major himself was no horseman; a lamentable exhibition

in the saddle ; he had a capital seat in a dog-cart, that was all.

Presently, as the cowed and subdued grey was about to be led off to the stable, with drooping head and heaving sides, Cuckoo rushed at the groom excitedly, and said :

“ You have not told us his name. What is he called ? ”

“ Faix ! the only name I ever heard put on him was Clancy’s mad colt, but I believe he was christened ‘ Scatter Brains,’ ” replied the little man with a sly smile as he led his charge away, to have a rub down and a feed.

That evening “ Scatter Brains ” was purchased by George Holroyd for seventy-five guineas, and a luckpenny to the groom, who received it, and a glass of whisky, with an expression of intense satisfaction—not to say relief.

“You are not from this part of the world, are you?” enquired George by way of conversation.

“No, your honour, I was formerly a native of Cork, and I would not tell your honour a lie.”

“And of where are you *now* a native?”

“Well—I’ve been at Clancy’s this fifteen years. I see you can ride, sir,” he continued confidentially. “So I’ve no shame or fear in telling you, that that horse requires a power of humouring. I’ve never walked straight since the last time he got shut of me. We are not sorry to part with him; he has a desperate trick of bolting, and for nothing at all! When you are just walking innocently along the road, he is away with you. He has a terrible bad name, and that’s why ye got him chape; they

does be all in dread of him ! But there is just wan resource, for a man with nerve, and I'll tell it to you. Pretend you *like* it—I never could—and that will cure him. When he bolts with hounds (as in course he always does), and mostly lames a couple of dogs, stick in the spurs, and lam into him with a *new* ashplant, until he is fit to drop, just give him his head, *and* the stick : he could not fall if he tried, and when ye feel him under you, just devouring the ground, and greedy to be airing himself over an eighteen foot gripe and double, ye would not grudge three hundred sovereigns ; he is a chaser, that's what *he is*, and invaluable to a stout rider, a bold man like yourself—but many and many's the time I thought he would make a ghost of *me*."

"And have you lost your nerve ?"

“Between ourselves, sir,” lowering his voice, “I have ; I haven’t a pinch left. I’ve scarcely a whole bone in me skin. I was first a riding boy, and then a jock, and then a breaker-in, and I have had some extraordinary bad falls. Well, sir, since you *are* so pressing, I’ll take just another tinte of whisky, and wishing long life and good luck to your honour, and many a good day on the grey,” and so somewhat unsteadily departed.

CHAPTER X.

BETTY MAKES TWO CONQUESTS.

SHORTLY after his purchase of "Scatter Brains," Mr. Holroyd appeared at a popular meet of the Harriers, got up in unimpeachable boots and breeches, but somewhat spoiling the effect, by carrying the prescribed ashplant. He and his mount were critically scanned by the sporting community—who sat ranged along the top of a low wall, bordering the road, and subsequently pursued on foot.

The grey horse was unanimously approved of, "passed," and pronounced to be a grand one and a goer, and invidious comparisons were audibly drawn between him and an old "Stageen," on which

another gentleman was mounted. All at once, a shrill gossoon exclaimed, as if announcing a most portentous discovery :

“I have it, boys ! May I never ate, bite, or sup, if it isn’t Clancy’s grey.”

“Clancy’s grey,” echoed another voice, “that he has been striving to sell this two year and more ! Oh, the poor, innocent, young English officer !” then in a louder key to George, “Don’t be riding *too* far from a churchyard, yer honour !”

“Is there a doctor out the day ?” enquired a third pleasantly.

“Mother av Moses ! why didn’t ye bring your coffin with ye ?”

So far “Clancy” (as he was called, the other name being too suggestive) had been behaving amazingly well, merely snorting and glaring and prancing ; even as they trotted up the soft green fields to draw the furrows, he only moved as

if stepping upon hot bricks, with now and then a sidle and a squeal. But once the hare was found, and there was a bustle, and a rush forward at a narrow razor bank, with a big gripe on the near side, he cocked his ears, and practically took leave of the field, as if he had urgent private affairs, going at racing pace, and carrying his rider over it before he had time to breathe. He soon outpaced the furious huntsman, and the fleeting hounds, lastly the hare, and was making with all speed for his stable at Bridgetstown. He jumped very big, and appeared to know all about it, and as the fences seemed sound, George sat down in his saddle, and let him have it with the ashplant! A wilder career was seldom seen. "Clancy" tore along like a thing possessed, flying over hedges, till they seemed to whizz past. Once or twice,

he landed on his nose, but struggled up in a second, and was going again as hard as ever. Cuckoo, Betty, and Denis, posted on a neighbouring hill, with an old red spy-glass, watched his headlong course, with breathless interest.

“There he is in Hourrigan’s land, and now he is over Murphy’s boundary,” shouted Denis slapping his leg; “that horse would win the Liverpool if he was put in training!—why, he is making for those boggy fields near the canal. He had better mind himself. Whew! there he goes in plump, *that* will cook his goose, and unless I am much mistaken, he will lay down his knife and fork!”

George had been prepared for this emergency, and had taken his feet out of the stirrups, and when his somewhat blown hunter skimmed a low bank, and landed in what *looked* like beautiful

green grass, but was really soft treacherous bog, he was off his back in an instant. "Clancy" struggled madly, snorted and panted with fear, but the more he struggled the deeper he sank; in a very short time he was up to his girths. "You want a lesson, my friend," remarked his master, calmly lighting a cigarette. "A nice condition my boots are in! You must learn that this unpleasant state of affairs is the natural result of running away, and that it is my turn now."

At length, when the grey was completely exhausted, and had subsided so much that his situation began to be a little precarious, his owner had compassion on him, and he and Denis, and a couple of labouring men, with ropes, helped him out, a shameful, pitiful spectacle, a black horse with a grey head!

He appeared to feel his position very keenly, skulking home along the edge of the roads with his tail tucked between his legs, as if saying to the hedges, "*Hide me !*"

After this experience, "Clancy" became a comparatively reformed character, and merely amused himself with prancing, and plunging at the meets, and subsequently making an example of the whole field.

The Major discovered, to his intense disgust, that his stepson had got a wonderful bargain—a prize he was resolved to secure for himself on that young man's departure. "Clancy" was well aware that his new owner was a strong bold rider, who was his master ; and, although he was by no means a mount for a timid, elderly gentleman, he was a mount for a brave young lady, and Miss Dopping's old

face lit up with keen delight, when she saw Betty Redmond, sitting squarely on the grey, as he clattered up the town, escorted by George on the Major's dog-cart mare, and Cuckoo on the blacksmith's pony. The grey was a rare fencer in a big country, and sailed over everything that came in his way, with equal satisfaction to himself (for he had a craze for fencing) and his rider ; his performances with the foxhounds were noted by "The Man at the Cross Roads" in the *Irish Times*, and the Major took extraordinary credit to himself, as he attended the meets on wheels, and flourished his red silk pocket-handkerchief, and pointed out his purchase to his friends, saying in his loud hoarse voice :

"You see old Tom Malone has an eye for a horse yet." (All the same, Tom Malone had never been credited

with this particular class of eye, at any period !)

“Look at that grey my stepson is riding. *I* bought him, and dirt cheap too. He can make a holy show of every horse in the country ; he is a chaser, that’s what he is, and would fetch three hundred any day. Eh ? What ? What ?”

* * * * *

George, with his hunter and his gun, was now frequently absent from Ballingoole, staying in various hospitable country houses with recent acquaintances, with relations of brother officers, or with hunting men. His mother was gratified ; she “liked to see her bairn respected like the lave.” The Major was gratified from other reasons, and the only person who was dissatisfied was Belle. Was her prize to be snatched away from her, by the

hungry, scheming mothers of anxious marriageable daughters ?

Or would absence make his heart grow fonder of her—or of somebody else ?

Early in February, the meet of the Runmore foxhounds happened to be a central one, and within two miles of Ballingooole ; this was always one of the great events of the season, when all the population, gentle and simple, turned out *en masse*. The labourers had a holiday, the townspeople closed their shops, and every jaunting car and ass's cart in the parish, took the road to Drubberstown Cross. Even Belle, who hated fox-hunting, secured a seat in the Mahons' wagonette. The Major was mounted in his dog-cart, George on the grey, and Denis on an elderly, but excellent black mare belonging to the priest. Cuckoo

and Betty (who knew every yard of the country and always evinced a most active interest in the Harriers) set out at an early hour in Mrs. Malone's donkey car ; indeed Betty had had a narrow escape of figuring at the meet, with the bath-chair at her heels, but Belle had not allowed her mother to develop the idea. As long as George Holroyd was in the country, the old lady must forego such carriage exercise. Astute Belle had gathered that he disapproved of her turn-out, so Betty and Cuckoo had driven off in a little village cart, behind "Mookieanna," a well-fed sporting donkey—all three being in the highest spirits. The young ladies had laid their plans with much discrimination, and resolved to relinquish the glories of the meet, and to go instead, and take up a strong position, from whence they would be able to see the subsequent run—if run

there was. They drove straight to the Hill of Knock, on the side of which lies a neat gorse patch, a sure warrant for a game fox. Tying Mookieanna to the gate, they walked up through three large bare fields to the cover side, and then discovered, to their intense disgust, crowds of country people assembled close to it, smoking and joking, round several large fires, awaiting the arrival of the hounds.

“It would be hard for them to find a fox here to-day,” exclaimed Betty, breathless and angry.

“Faix, and so it would, miss,” calmly assented Mike, Mrs. Redmond’s handy man and gardener. “Sure, didn’t I see a brace of them break out of it this morning, with my own two eyes, but I’m thinking, maybe *himself* is in it yet.”

“There is no use in staying here,” said Cuckoo scornfully. “They won’t find

here, and will go on and draw Coolambar Hill. We have plenty of time to run across to it ; it's barely a mile-and-a-half by the short cut. Mike, do you take home the donkey, he is tied below at the gate."

And the two girls girded up their dresses, and fled down the hill, an exceedingly active couple. "They ran like hares," to quote admirers round the cover fires—they climbed, they jumped, they struggled through hedges, with the ease that came from youth, and health and practice. As they were about to breast Coolambar Hill, Betty paused suddenly with a dramatic gesture, and said :

"Hush ! Cuckoo. I *hear* them ; they have found !" and sure enough, their listening ears caught the distant whimper of hounds, now giving louder and louder tongue.

Betty's cheeks were scarlet with excite-

ment, and even the pale Cuckoo was moved.

“Here, Cuckoo, climb upon this wall,” said her friend, dragging her forward as she spoke, and nearly pulling her arms out of their sockets; “we shall have a splendid view.”

And on the top of the wall, they stood hand in hand, panting from their recent run, with their eyes eagerly bent on Knock cover. Yes, here come the hounds streaming down, half-a-dozen little white specks, then the whole pack, then half-a-dozen horsemen, then the whole field.

“Mike was right, you see he *was* at home after all,” said Betty, “but oh! he has been headed off by those sheep; he won’t come here, he will go for Bresna Wood, six miles away, if it’s an inch.”

The hounds passed in full cry, within two fields of the girls, closely followed by

the huntsman, a steeplechase rider, and a spare-looking whip, on a bony chestnut thoroughbred.

“ Here is George,” cried Cuckoo, triumphantly ; “ he is coming into this field. Does not ‘ Clancy ’ jump beautifully ? ” as the eager grey negotiated a razor bank, between two deep though narrow ditches.

“ And just look at this man—riding jealous ”—as another horseman came at the same fence at racing pace.

“ Why it’s Ghosty Moore ! ”

The words had scarcely left her lips, when a catastrophe cut short Ghosty’s career. His horse, already blown and over-ridden (but willing) took off too far, failed to kick the bank, and fell back into the near gripe, with a loud exclamation from his rider. He and his horse were both completely lost to sight ; they had

disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed them. A shrill yell from Cuckoo, piercing as a steam whistle, caused her brother to turn his head, and he beheld her running down the field, waving her arms like a windmill gone mad.

Of course he must stop ; he pulled in the grey with considerable difficulty, for Clancy was bent on pursuing ! He would be furious if some nonsense of Cuckoo's cost him what looked like the run of the season ; he turned his horse, and galloped up to her.

“What the deuce is the matter ?” he demanded impatiently.

“A man,” she gasped, “a man has been killed,” pointing to the ditch, from which there was neither sound nor sign.

George was on the spot in another five seconds, and saw four shining, kicking

hoofs, turned upwards, and heard a sickening groan, as of one in mortal agony.

Here was a nice fix ! Some fellow under his horse, that horse jammed fast in a narrow gripe ten feet deep, and no one to help him, but a couple of girls !

The hunt had passed to the left—swept on with the inexorable determination of foxhounds running a burning scent ; already there was not a soul to be seen, for only the hard riders had come this way—the less keen had taken to a convenient lane. George was off the grey, and down in the ditch, as quick as thought. If he could only get the horse lengthways, he might manage to drag his rider from under him, but this was impossible, single-handed. It looked a serious business, and there was no time to be lost.

“Come down, Cuckoo, like a good girl,” he said coaxingly, “come down, and give me a hand. There is no fear of you. I’ll take care of that.”

Cuckoo peered down with a ghastly face, and saw the struggling iron shoes, the blood upon her brother’s gloves, and heard half-stifled moans of anguish.

“I daren’t, George. Oh, I daren’t!” and she began to cry.

“I dare, I am not afraid,” said Betty, scrambling hastily into the ditch beside him; “only tell me what I am to do.”

“I’ll manage the horse, if you can move the man,” returned George. “Just put your hands under his arms, very firmly, and hold fast, and when I give you the word, pull with all your strength—*now*.”

The experiment proved successful. Mr. Moore was luckily a very light weight,

and George Holroyd was a strong man, otherwise he would have remained much longer at the bottom of the ditch ; but as it was, after several attempts, these two good Samaritans got him out between them, and laid him on the grass—a truly ghastly object ; his head, which had come in contact with a stone, was bleeding profusely ; his white face was streaked with blood, and he seemed to be insensible.

George took off his coat, and folded it up into a sort of pillow for the sufferer, then he produced his flask, and endeavoured to pour some of its contents between his closed teeth.

“He is dead ! Ghosty Moore is dead,” shrieked Cuckoo, and she ran up the field giving vent to a series of agonising screams ; she had no nerves whatever, and the sight of blood made her sick and

terrified. Yes, even the bold and saucy Cuckoo ! she was as useless as the grey, who, with streaming reins, grazed greedily along the hedge row, sublimely indifferent to the fate of his companion, who was struggling in the adjacent ditch. Presently George went down and righted him, and got him out, a limping terrified spectacle, and then he said to Betty, who had been trying to bind up the wounded man's head with their handkerchiefs : "Some one must go for help at once, either you or I !",

"There are no cottages near this, and Ballingoole is four miles off. You had better go ; you will go faster," she returned promptly.

"But I don't know the way," he replied.

"There is a lane at this gate, and if the gate is locked, try a corner, there's

sure to be a gap, and then turn to the left, and keep straight out."

"You are certain you don't mind being left here by yourself?" said George, pouring some more sherry down the throat of their unconscious patient; "you seem to have made a good job with the bandages, but I am afraid his arm is broken, and he seems in a bad way—a very bad way."

They looked at one another gravely.

Supposing he were to die, with no one by him but Betty?—for Cuckoo had actually left the field, and was nowhere to be seen.

"You must take your coat," said the girl, "and place his head in my lap; it will answer as well, but before you go, bring me some water in your hat."

"Here it is," he said, speedily returning with his dripping property. "And I'll fix

his saddle for you to sit on, instead of this wet field."

"No, please don't," she vainly remonstrated, "there is no time to lose, you must not think of *me*."

Nevertheless George thought a good deal about Betty, as he galloped into Ballingoo, in search of Dr. Moran. What a brave girl she was, remaining there alone, with, for all they knew, a dying man. She was just the sort of girl to stand beside one at a pinch ; now he came to think of it, her face was of the heroic type. As to Cuckoo ! he scarcely dared to let his mind dwell on his shameless hysterical young relative, whom he presently overtook proceeding homewards at a kind of shambling run.

"Cuckoo !" he called out sternly, "I am ashamed of you."

"I am going for help," sobbed Cuckoo,

who was what is known among the lower orders as “roaring and crying.” “Is—is—he dead yet?”

“Go to the first cabin you come across, and borrow a door and a blanket,” shouted her brother, and then pushed on, and was so expeditious, that within an hour the wounded man had been removed from the scene of his accident, and conveyed home carefully in the charge of Dr. Moran. Augustus Moore, nick-named “Ghosty,” on account of his white face, lint locks, and spare figure, was the eldest son of Colonel Moore of Roskeen, a county magnate, who possessed not only lands, but money. He had been accustomed to see Betty Redmond ever since she was a small child, and he liked her, but something stronger than mere liking awoke in his bosom, when he came to his senses, and found himself lying with his head in Betty’s lap at the foot

of Coolambar Hill. He was so stunned, and bruised, and weak, that he firmly believed that he had entered on his last hour ; but Betty's presence cheered him. She bathed his face, moistened his dry lips, restored his confidence, and gave him heart in one sense, whilst she took it away in another.

As he lay there, helpless, between sod and sky, with her sympathetic voice in his ears, her sweet anxious face bent over his, he made up his mind, that if he lived, he would like to marry Betty Redmond. This was a curious coincidence, for George Holroyd, as he walked home beside her, that grey wintry afternoon, four long miles through muddy roads and lanes, with "Clancy's" bridle over his arm, had almost come to the same conclusion. At any rate, he told himself that she was the prettiest, pluckiest, and nicest girl it had

ever been his luck to know. However an immediate visit to the other side of the county, drew him away from Betty's unexpected fascinations—and they did not meet again for many weeks.

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